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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Yorktown Crow Tests Positive for West Nile Virus

The Westchester County Department of Health today received notification from the New York State Health Department's Wadsworth Laboratory that a crow from Yorktown has tested positive for the West Nile Virus.

The dead crow was submitted for testing on May 10, 2001. This is the first confirmation of West Nile Virus in a bird in Westchester County this year. The infected crow is the first among 407 birds collected statewide and submitted to the State Health Department since January 2001 to test positive. There are no plans to conduct ground spraying anywhere in Westchester County as a result of this finding. In addition, no positive mosquitoes or human cases of West Nile Virus have been detected in the County.

"Considering that West Nile virus has been present in Westchester County in 1999 and 2000, this finding is not unexpected," said Joshua Lipsman M.D., M.P.H., Westchester County Commissioner of Health. "Westchester County has been preparing for this eventuality for months. We have our systems in place already. In fact, certified technicians from the Health Department are already out applying larvicide to municipal and county catch basins to kill immature mosquitoes in the larval stage."

"Basically, this positive crow serves as a reminder that West Nile virus is still here and that it is important for everyone to eliminate all sources of standing water from around their homes and to take precautions against mosquito bites," continued Dr. Lipsman.

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The Health Department is encouraging residents to report dead birds through its West Nile Virus Information Line at (914) 813-5609. The Health Department will not be collecting dead birds from the public this year for testing, but would still like the public to report information about where dead birds are being found for tracking purposes. “Dead birds, especially crows, seem to be a good indication of the presence of West Nile Virus in a community. Residents who report information about dead birds are performing a valuable service, as this will provide us with vital tracking information,” stated Dr. Lipsman.

The following strategies are recommended to reduce mosquito breeding sites:

- Remove outside objects such as empty buckets, old tires, and any other containers in which water accumulates and where mosquitoes may breed.
- If receptacles capable of holding water cannot be removed, they should be emptied, turned over, covered, or have holes drilled in the bottom so that water cannot collect in them.
- Clean and empty water from clogged roof gutters.
- Change the water in birdbaths at least twice weekly.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools, outdoor spas and hot tubs.
- Drain water from pool covers.
- Use landscaping to eliminate stagnant water that collects on your property; clean up leaf litter and similar organic debris.

Residents are also invited to join in Westchester County’s Spring S.T.I.N.G. Weekend on June 9th and 10th. This weekend has been designated as community clean-up days to eliminate mosquito breeding grounds in Westchester County. Residents can take part in Spring S.T.I.N.G. Weekend by eliminating mosquito breeding grounds around their own home, or by organizing a neighborhood clean-up squad to work together. Residents can also partner with a community organization to tackle the clean-up of bigger areas throughout the County. Citizens Campaign for the Environment, Spring S.T.I.N.G.’s co-sponsor, will be assembling clean-up teams to work throughout the County. To join with them, call (914) 997-0946.

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As part of Spring S.T.I.N.G. Weekend, residents are encouraged to get rid of old tires by bringing them to Westchester Community College on Saturday, June 9th for recycling. More than 20,000 tires have been collected in Westchester County since May 1, 2000 under the County Executive's initiatives with municipalities. Used tires have become the most common breeding ground for mosquitoes that are known to carry West Nile virus.

Personal protection measures to take against mosquito bites include:

- Using insect repellants with no more than 30% DEET (N, N-diethyl-meta-toluamide) when outdoors for extended periods of time. Use 10% or less DEET for children. Do not use DEET on infants. Insect repellants should be used during the time of year (April through October) and at dusk and evening hours when mosquitoes are most likely to bite. Be sure to read and follow the manufacturer's directions for use.
- Wearing protective clothing such as long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and socks when outdoors for extended periods of time.

A wealth of information on West Nile virus can be found on the Health Department's website www.westchestergov.com/health and on the West Nile Virus Information Line which can be reached by calling (914) 813-5609.