

PUBLIC EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Objective:

To inform Peel residents about WNV and the measures that they can take to prevent human illness including mosquito breeding site reduction and mosquito personal protective measures.

Background:

In 2001, Peel Public Health introduced its first WNV Public Education Campaign – Put Mosquitoes Out of Touch. The campaign informed Peel residents about WNV, emphasizing personal protection against mosquito bites, and habitat reduction. The tactics included a mail-out to over 300,000 households, the development of an information package for public distribution at targeted locations, development of a dedicated WNV Web site (www.peel-bugbite.ca) and advertisements in local newspapers. Successive campaigns since 2002 were built on this original initiative and each year, materials and tactics are reviewed, revised and enhanced.

In 2004, Peel Public Health and Communication Services developed a strategy and messages to complement the provincial WNV campaign. The objectives of the communication activities in 2004 and 2005 included: continued education of residents about WNV, the need to report dead crows and blue jays, the importance of mosquito reduction through the removal of sources of stagnant water on private property and the use of personal protection measures.

The tactics of the 2004 and 2005 WNV public education campaigns in Peel included a mail-out to over 320,000 households in Peel, advertisements in local papers, and distribution of educational materials to the area municipalities, Region of Peel staff and multi cultural groups.

In 2006, Peel Health will continue to maintain public awareness of West Nile Virus, risk, surveillance and prevention through the media, our WNV Web site (www.peel-bugbite.ca), advertising in local publications and at community displays.

Planned Activities:

- Presentations on the West Nile Virus Prevention Plan will be made at Regional and area municipal Councils if requested. Additional presentations to the general public will be conducted on an as-needed, issue-driven basis.
- Existing and new educational materials will be produced and distributed in high-traffic areas in Peel. They will also be shared with local municipalities, neighbouring health departments, and conservation authorities for their

information and distribution. Most materials will also be available on the Region of Peel WNV Web site.

- Educational materials will be sent to special groups: long-term care facilities, child care centres, garden centres, parks and recreation departments, physicians, golf courses and horticultural societies.
- Educational materials will also be sent to various seniors' groups in all three municipalities (e.g., Mississauga Seniors' Centre, Brampton Senior Citizen Council).
- The WNV display, in conjunction with other educational materials, will be used to educate the public about the issue. It will be set up and staffed by Peel Public Health employees in strategic locations such as Regional facilities, other high-traffic areas in Peel and the Children's Water Festival.
- Ministry of the Environment regulatory requirements for public notification of the use of larvicides will be met through regular newspaper notices. In areas other than catch basins, a notice of larviciding sign will be posted at the site.
- A series of advertisements with key WNV messages will be placed in local newspapers in Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon.
- Extensive media relations activities will include ongoing news releases to the local and specialty media (garden, seniors, parenting), interviews with the MOH and AMOH and media briefings and/or news conferences if required.
- The WNV Web site (www.peel-bugbite.ca) was enhanced for easier navigation in 2005. It will continue to be regularly updated in 2006 with information on WNV biology, transmission, personal protection and reduction measures. The catch basin larviciding schedule will be updated regularly. An on-line stagnant water form was added to the Web site in 2004. On-line submissions accounted for approximately 10% of the stagnant water reports. On-line stagnant water reporting will continue in 2006.
- Local health care providers will be notified through a faxed newsletter, called *Health Professionals Update*. Early in the WNV season, information on WNV signs and symptoms, laboratory diagnosis, treatment, patient counselling and reporting to Peel Public Health will be provided. Additional notification will be provided on the status of WNV should the situation progress or change.
- WNV weekly updates will be produced for Regional Councillors, local municipalities, neighbouring health departments, conservation authorities, the media, and other stakeholders. The updates will be widely distributed and will also be available on the WNV Web site.

- Communication to Regional employees will consist of regular updates to all Regional staff through Pathways, *Inside Peel*, departmental meetings and informal discussions.
- A multicultural component of the strategy will include enlisting the help of Peel Public Health's internal contacts from ethnic communities to disseminate WNV key messages through local and GTA ethnic media and through multicultural community centres. Translated WNV fact sheets will also be available on the WNV Web site for downloading and distribution.
- A contingency communication plan in the event of adulticiding has been developed. It includes tactics such as public meetings, advertising, direct mail, news conferences and briefings, news releases, updates on the WNV Web site with information on adulticiding including maps and schedules for spraying, ongoing updates to key audiences, and notices in local newspapers.
- Peel Public Health will also act as a resource to local occupational health and safety departments if they require assistance in drafting policies and educating employees regarding WNV. Peel Public Health will provide occupational health and safety training to its employees involved in mosquito surveillance and control operations. Additionally, Peel Public Health will require that employees of contracted vendors be provided with similar training and information.
- Peel Public Health will hand deliver WNV educational pamphlets to households in the vicinity of a positive mosquito batch or human case. Peel Public Health staff will also be available to conduct stagnant water surveys on residential properties in areas where positive mosquito batches or human cases are located.