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	Temp: 40 °F
	Hi: 58 °F
	Lo: 43 °F

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ANOTHER VIEW

State is prepared for West Nile virus

HEALTH: Workshops help local governments control mosquitoes safely, legally.

Tom Fitzsimmons, Jeff Koenings, Valoria Loveland and Mary Selecky, Guest Columnists

Our current warm spring weather is raising fears about new outbreaks of West Nile virus.

In response, people everywhere are cleaning out gutters and birdbaths to prevent mosquitoes from hatching near their homes, stocking up on insect repellents and fixing window screens.

Those of us who work in state government are busy, too. We've been meeting regularly since last year to plan and prepare for West Nile virus - to make sure we are giving consistent advice and our regulatory roles are clear and not in conflict.

This past winter, we conducted workshops throughout the state to help local governments learn how to control mosquitoes safely and legally, and we've educated horse owners on the importance of getting their horses immunized.

To be sure we know when and where West Nile appears in our state, we're working with local health districts to collect and test dead birds. And we're developing a

For more

For suggestions on how people can protect themselves against West Nile virus, check:

- The state Department of Health's comprehensive Web site at www.doh.wa.gov/wnv.

were developing a streamlined permit process for pesticide applicators.

• Or call the department's toll-free recorded information line at (866) 78VIRUS.



eTechnology

• DVDs steal show

The state Department of Health has put together a comprehensive Web site and a toll-free recorded information line full of useful suggestions on how people can protect themselves against the disease.

Fortunately, the best protections are also the easiest: Empty standing water from old tires, gutters, toys and buckets in your yard. Wear long sleeves and an insect repellent containing DEET. Fix screens on windows. If possible, avoid going out at dawn and dusk when the mosquitoes are most active.

Although the risk to any one person is low - a total of 277 people nationwide have died from West Nile virus in the past three years - it is a frightening disease and we don't take it lightly.

Some would suggest we take more drastic measures such as draining wetlands or stocking mosquito-eating fish in our lakes. But healthy wetlands are full of natural predators, such as birds and frogs that eat mosquitoes. Wetlands also help clean polluted waters, prevent floods and protect drinking-water supplies.

Mosquitoes can actually increase if wetlands are destroyed; while mosquito species need only a small puddle or depression in which to breed, many of their predators need more space.

If necessary, wetlands can be professionally treated by licensed pesticide applicators. They know the best ways to control mosquitoes without killing other beneficial species or exposing people to pesticides.

For self-contained waters such as fountains and artificial ponds, homeowners can buy *Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis*, or Bti, a naturally occurring organism that kills mosquito larvae before they hatch.

While fish can help control mosquitoes, introducing non-native species can cause more harm than good. Non-native species can compete with or even wipe out native fish. Check with a regional Department of Fish and Wildlife office before releasing fish into any water body.

West Nile virus is here, and it's likely to be with us for some time to come. We can protect ourselves

from the disease without harming fish, birds and other wildlife. It's a matter of being prepared.

Tom Fitzsimmons is director of the state Department of Ecology, Jeff Koenings is director of the state Department of Fish and Wildlife, Valoria Loveland is director of the state Department of Agriculture, and Mary Selecky is secretary of the state Department of Health.

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