

Dead Bird West Nile Virus Chronic Infections - FAQs

Revised February 2014

What is a West Nile virus (WNV) positive dead bird?

A WNV “positive” dead bird has high levels of WNV in its tissues and likely died of WNV. WNV positive dead birds are excellent indicators of recent exposure to WNV infected mosquitoes, and thus indicate current WNV risk to people.

What is a WNV chronic infection in a dead bird?

Although many birds die soon after contracting WNV, some survive with persisting low levels of virus for months. These birds were previously reported as “chronic” from 2010 to 2013. Although infected with WNV at some time in the past, they likely died of other causes. Due to changes in testing protocol, we are no longer reporting chronic infections.

Do WNV chronic dead birds provide information on WNV activity?

Without additional indicators of WNV activity, such as positive mosquitoes or seropositive chickens, no increased mosquito control intervention is warranted in response to a dead bird with WNV chronic infection.

How will birds that were previously characterized as having WNV chronic infections be reported?

The Center for Vectorborne Diseases, the reference laboratory for WNV environmental surveillance in California at UC Davis, and local vector control agencies are now reporting all dead bird test results as either positive (Ct <40) or negative (Ct >40) as of 2014.

If a bird has a WNV chronic infection, can we estimate how long ago it became initially infected with the virus?

No, we are not able to estimate when a bird with a chronic infection was initially infected. Experimental studies have shown that birds can exhibit chronic infections up to 9 months after initial infection.

If an uninfected mosquito feeds on a bird with a WNV chronic infection, will it become infected?

No. A bird with a chronic infection has very low levels of virus and cannot infect biting mosquitoes.