Avoiding West Nile While Working

Nationwide, this summer there have been 1086 human cases of West Nile virus infection and 46 fatalities. In Kentucky alone, there have been at least 12 confirmed human infections and 2 deaths associated with West Nile infection. West Nile virus is transmitted to humans through mosquito bites. West Nile virus also infects birds (reservoir host) and horses (incidental infection). People who work outside when mosquitoes are biting are more at risk for exposure to the West Nile virus.

Severe and mild forms of illness may be observed following West Nile infection. Even though the possibility of contracting severe illness from West Nile infection while working is relatively rare, precautions to further reduce your chances for illness should be taken while working outside according to CDC and NIOSH recommendations:

1. Avoid working at dusk or dawn when most mosquitoes are actively biting.
2. During the day, avoid weedy and/or wooded areas where mosquitoes are more active.
3. Do not have stagnant water around. Stagnant water provides an ideal place for mosquitoes to lay their eggs. Remove or cover places where water sits such as gutters, barrels, and pots.
4. If it is necessary to be outside, apply insect sprays containing DEET (N,N-diethy-meta-toluamide) or wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts with insect repellant sprayed directly on the clothing and on exposed skin. Don’t use repellant more often than recommended.
5. If you feel ill (body aches, eye pain, and high temperature) after working outside in mosquito-infested areas, seek medical care.

Kentucky FACE is an occupational fatality surveillance and intervention project. Its purpose is to collect data on work-related fatalities in Kentucky and to develop recommendations and strategies for prevention.