



MAYOR GINA-LOUISE SCIARRA

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Statement from Mayor Gina-Louise Sciarra on Mosquitos

Recently, I have received communications from some concerned residents regarding the increased mosquito population in Northampton. The mosquito population experienced throughout western Massachusetts is an unfortunate consequence of the unseasonable rain and flooding we have had over the past month. The mosquitos add miserable insult to injury of all the hardship and damage from the flooding.

I assure everyone that Merridith O'Leary, the Northampton Department of Health & Human Services Commissioner, and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) are actively monitoring the situation. Additionally, the Pioneer Valley Mosquito Control District (PVMCD), of which Northampton is a member and Commissioner O'Leary a board member, is routinely trapping and testing mosquitos to monitor for mosquito-borne diseases that pose a risk to human health. The central purpose of mosquito surveillance is to provide information to the public that will guide prevention education, planning, and activities to reduce the risk of human disease for Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) and West Nile Virus (WNV). Public awareness of what can be done to reduce the risk of infection is of utmost importance.

To date, there have been 15 positive WNV mosquito samples in the entire state, four positive mosquito samples in the Pioneer Valley, and two in Hampshire County (in South Hadley and Hadley). This is not an unusual number of positive cases and doesn't represent a major threat to human health. In 2017 Hampshire County had two positive mosquitos by this time of year and did not have a single human case of WNV that year. Hampshire County has had only two reported human cases of West Nile Virus in the last 10 years, neither of which were in Northampton. Currently, the MDPH disease risk map has the City of Northampton placed at "remote risk" for EEE, meaning it is usually not found in the area and low risk for WNV, meaning infection is unlikely for the disease.

Generally speaking, an increase in the mosquito population can lead to an increased risk of disease transmission. Therefore, in response to the increased mosquito activity, the city has amended the contract to receive additional services with the mosquito control company that does its regular seasonal larvicide to reduce breeding activity. This EPA-approved larvicide is species-specific and will not harm humans, animals, birds, other insects, fish, shellfish, plants, or the environment. This safe and targeted approach will help reduce the mosquito population over the next few weeks, though we still predict an increase in mosquito populations until a frost. It's important to note that this effort will

not affect the mosquitos flying today. We also urge residents to do whatever abatement they can on their property, especially removing any standing water, even the smallest amounts.

Multiple tools are available to help reduce the risk of human infections from mosquitos. No tool is 100% effective or precise, and the risk of disease is most effectively mitigated by using a combination of tactics. However, we know that broadly applying pesticides to kill adult mosquitos that are not posing a disease risk is not the preferred response and could have unintended consequences for public health and the environment. It is a last-resort action that should only be taken in cases where the disease risk outweighs the other health and environmental concerns. Based on vocal feedback from residents, Northampton has worked hard to limit the use of pesticides in many areas of its work. In 2019, the City Council established a Select Committee on Pesticide Reduction. It passed an ordinance banning the use of pesticides on city-owned parks, fields, and playgrounds unless there is an emergency that poses an immediate threat.

While it is uncomfortable and definitely unpleasant, the increased mosquito population has not reached the level of a public health emergency that would trigger a pesticide control response. When data indicates that the risk for human infections is increasing and is not adequately reduced by other measures, MDPH will work with the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) and convene with mosquito control districts to get recommendations for appropriate mosquito control interventions to reduce the public health risk. This group of professionals will recommend appropriate pesticides, routes, and means of treatment for specific areas.

The city cannot conduct a broadcast application of pesticide that will violate ordinance and will risk people's health (especially for sensitive populations such as children and older adults), be detrimental to the farms struggling to recover from the floods, and be unhealthy for local plants and animals. If the risk for disease necessitates the state conducting truck or aerial spraying, then property owners could opt out individually, and the city would inform residents on how to opt-out.

Your response on your own property is up to you, and again, Commissioner O'Leary has urged residents to take precautions and to please help by eliminating any potential breeding grounds of standing water.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any further concerns or questions. I value your feedback, and everyone who works for the city is committed to the well-being of all our residents. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation, and know that I am swatting right along with you.

For more information, contact the Mayor's Office at 413-587-1249 or mayor@northamptonma.gov.