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Health Dept.: Island led city in positive West Nile findings

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Staten Island led all five boroughs in positive West Nile virus findings in 2001, according to a city Department of Health summary of West Nile virus research released yesterday.

The number of birds and mosquito pools in Staten Island found to be infected far outweighed the totals for the other boroughs. Of the seven confirmed human cases of West Nile virus across the city this year, two were from Staten Island, two from Brooklyn, two from Queens, and one was found in Manhattan.

Health officials confirmed in August that a 73-year-old Westerleigh woman and a 44-year-old Richmond man had contracted the mosquito-borne disease. Both victims successfully recovered.

The Health Department found 208 mosquito pools that tested positive for the virus, with 108 of them, or about 52 percent, on Staten Island. The borough's total dwarfed even that of Queens, the city's other West Nile hotbed, where 46 infected mosquito pools were found.

Of the 237 dead birds that tested positive, 96 of them, or roughly 41 percent, were found on Staten Island.

Larvicides were used to combat the virus between May and August, but the first confirmed human case prompted a spate of ground-based spraying in "green spaces," such as golf courses and parks, and in residential areas across the Island.

The spraying came under scathing criticism from environmentalists and some public health advocates, who said the pesticides used lead to increases in childhood asthma and breathing problems among the elderly. Opponents also argued there is no evidence spraying is effective.

In its report, the Health Department cited a recent environmental impact statement that found Anvil, the pesticide used for spraying, "does not pose significant adverse impacts to human health or the environment."

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