



Staten Island Advance

Larvicide sprayings coming to Staten Island neighborhoods to help curb mosquito population



To squelch the mosquito population, the Health Department will use a larvicide called bacillus thuringiensis israelensis (BTI), a natural group of bacteria that targets and attacks mosquito larvae with no effect virtually no other animals. ((AP Photo/Pat Wellenbach))



By [Vincent Barone](#) | vbarone@siadvance.com

Email the author | [Follow on Twitter](#) on May 20, 2014 at 4:18 PM

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. – The NYC Department of Health & Hygiene will begin spraying a natural larvicide in all of the Island's storm drains this week to help stifle early mosquito problems in the borough.

For two weeks, residents have complained about mosquito swarms of biblical proportions in Oakwood, Port Richmond, Annadale and most notably New Dorp, where several locals have called in their concerns.

"Every morning and every evening they come in droves," said New Dorp resident Stacey Rosoff. "I can't leave my house without a can [of bug spray]."

On sultry spring days, the bug problem at Mrs. Rosoff's house is so dire that she must spray a trail of repellent as she walks from her doorstep to her car to keep the bugs at bay.

Meteorologist Tim Kines speculates that recent weather patterns could have played a hand in breeding the bugs.

"The above normal rainfall in March and April combined with the relatively low temperatures certainly could have helped [mosquito populations]," said Kines. "We didn't really have those normal warm spells in March or April that could have dried up the area."

Ed Johnson, Director of Science at the Staten Island Museum, warns that any stagnant water could easily be turned into a mosquito breeding ground. The bug only needs around six days to reach its adult stage.

"Any little area of standing water could be used by mosquitoes," said Johnson. "Even if roof gutters are clogged -- mosquitoes love that. Water collecting on top pool cover is another one. Some people are breeding the bugs without even knowing it."

Anna Sabella made sure her Oakwood property was free of all standing water. Still, her home is teeming with mosquitoes. Fighting off incessant attacks has become an unfortunate 2014 spring pastime.

"I've never seen this before," said Ms. Sabella. "When I get my paper from my front step, I turn and can swat three out for mosquitoes that are already on my door."

Owner of Top Hat Exterminating Ritchie Pascone has had an exceptionally busy May. In the 40 years he's worked in the industry, this spring has been the worst he's ever seen, across the pest board.

"I haven't seen anything like this," said Pascone. "It must be from the excessive moisture from last winter. Bugs like moisture. We're already working on bad ant and termite infestations."

To squelch the mosquito population, the Health Department will use a larvicide called bacillus thuringiensis israelensis (BTI), a natural group of bacteria that targets and attacks mosquito larvae with no effect virtually no other animals.

In addition to the larvicide, the Health Department will be continue to carry out its routine mosquito monitoring from June to October. These tactics include mosquito traps and animal host surveillance. The department will also partake in an "aggressive elimination" of standing water and urges residents to report any stagnant pools to 311.

If mosquito populations pose alarming threats to residents, the Health Department will carry out adulticide sprayings in concentrated, targeted areas. The department says that non-chemical solutions will be applied first, before issuing the lowest toxicity of pesticide that is effective on mosquitoes. If and when it plans a spraying, public will be notified at least 24 hours in advance.

As seen in the chart below (courtesy of the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene), Staten Island has seen the second most West Nile cases over the past 15 years with 57 reports --far behind Queens' 113 cases, though. As a city, bad outbreaks have been sporadic.

In the meantime, Islanders are beside themselves. Facebook user Roxanne Tansey, of New Springville said she had to deal with an incredulous school nurse after her eight-year-old son was bitten several times on his face two weeks ago.

"When my son went to school the school nurse called right away and said to pick him up it can't be mosquito bites they are not around yet, it's too cold and too early, it must be something else," commented Mrs. Tansey on the Staten Island Advance Facebook page. "I picked my son up and took to the doctors right away and was told [the bumps were] mosquito bites, I took son back to school with note (the same day I had to pick him up)."

Mrs. Rosoff says mosquito levels have been high in her New Dorp neighborhood since Hurricane Sandy. She fears that the storm has offered the pesky insects plenty of areas where stagnant water can collect.

"There used to be so much thick greenery towards the end of Tysens Lane. Now we can see right through to the water," Mrs. Rosoff said.

Mrs. Rosoff's neighbor, Galina Ablavsky noticed the same issue.

"Every time the wind blows from the beach, it's a like a wall of mosquitoes that comes towards my house," said Ablavsky, who gesticulated like a mime, pushing an invisible wall of mosquitoes. She shivered at the thought.