



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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ADPH cautions the public to protect themselves from mosquito-borne illnesses

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health reports that four cases of West Nile virus (WNV) have been reported in the state this summer.

Approximately 1 in 5 people who are infected with WNV will develop symptoms such as fever, headache, body aches, joint pains, vomiting, diarrhea or rash. Less than 1 percent will develop a serious neurologic illness such as encephalitis or meningitis (inflammation of the brain or surrounding tissues).

When a person is infected, early recognition and prompt supportive treatment for these illnesses can substantially lower the risk of developing severe disease. About 10 percent of people who develop neurologic infection due to WNV will die. People over 50 years of age and those with certain medical conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, hypertension, kidney disease and organ transplants, are at greater risk for serious illness.

Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE), WNV and other mosquito-borne viruses are transmitted by mosquitoes after they feed on birds. The same mosquitoes can then infect mammals, particularly humans and horses. Humans and horses can sometimes become seriously ill from the infection.

Vaccination exists and is effective for horses, but there is no commercially available vaccine for humans. In 2012, there have been 4 cases of EEE in horses located in Dallas County. Epidemiologists point out that EEE can be more dangerous to people and other mammals than other mosquito-borne viruses, but that the same mosquito prevention measures reduce exposures to any of these diseases.

Other arthropod-borne viruses, St. Louis Encephalitis Virus and La Crosse Encephalitis Virus, have been detected periodically but not commonly within various areas of the state for several years.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the best way to prevent the most common mosquito-borne diseases such as WNV and EEE is to avoid mosquito bites by following these recommendations:

- Use insect repellents when going outdoors.
- Wear long sleeves and pants during dawn and dusk.

- Install or repair screens on windows and doors. Use air conditioning, if available.
- Empty standing water from items outside homes, such as flowerpots, buckets and children's pools.

No medications are available to treat or vaccines available to prevent WNV infection. People with milder illnesses typically recover on their own, although symptoms may last for several weeks. In more severe cases, patients often need to be hospitalized to receive supportive treatment, such as intravenous fluids, pain medication and nursing care. Anyone who has symptoms that cause concern should contact a health care provider.

Repellents are an important tool to assist people in protecting themselves from mosquito-borne diseases. CDC recommends the use of repellents containing active ingredients which have been registered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for use as repellents applied to skin and clothing. Products containing these active ingredients typically provide reasonably long-lasting protection. These include the following:

- DEET
- Picaridin
- Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus or PMD, the synthesized version of oil of lemon eucalyptus
- IR3535

Insect repellents must state any age restrictions. According to the label, oil of lemon eucalyptus products should not be used on children under 3 years of age. Parents should choose the type and concentration of repellent to be used by taking into account the amount of time a child will be outdoors, exposure to mosquitoes, and the risk of mosquito-transmitted disease in the area. People should consult their health care provider for advice about using repellent products on children.

Sentinel chickens are used to monitor the presence of mosquito-borne disease in an area. Five sentinel chickens in Baldwin County and 3 sentinel chickens in Mobile County have tested positive for WNV this summer.

"With many people enjoying outdoor activities, it is important that residents take every effort to reduce their exposure to mosquitoes," Dr. Dee W. Jones, State Public Health Veterinarian, advises. "Keep your mosquito repellent with you at all times when you are working or participating in recreational activities outdoors."

Mosquitoes that can spread these viruses to humans are commonly found in urban and suburban communities as well as rural, freshwater swamp areas. They will breed readily in storm sewers, ditches, waste lagoons and artificial containers around houses.

The Health Department will continue to notify local officials of test results and recommend methods of prevention. More information is available at adph.org/epi/.