

Three more cases of West Nile virus announced in Alabama

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health announces three additional nonfatal cases of West Nile infection in Alabama residents, bringing the total number of cases in 2002 to 28. The new cases are in a 78-year-old man from Jefferson County, a 65-year-old man from Marion County, and a 38-year-old man from Madison County.

So far for 2002, one Alabama resident has died as a result of West Nile infection.

"The gradual occurrence of additional cases is, unfortunately, expected because this virus has become so widespread. Fortunately, most people who become infected will not become sick. However, one in 150 persons will suffer more severe symptoms of encephalitis that can include severe headache, confusion, coma and death," stated Dr. Charles Woernle, assistant state health officer for disease control and prevention. "Approximately 17 percent of patients that develop encephalitis will die as a result of the illness. Individuals are warned to continue taking precautions against being bitten by mosquitoes."

Thirty-nine horses, 429 birds and 63 mosquito pools have been confirmed with West Nile virus. The virus has been detected in 60 of Alabama's 67 counties. The department continues to believe that the virus is likely present in every Alabama community.

These counts far exceed the level of virus activity reported in 2001, when 59 positive birds in 13 counties were detected, and none earlier than the end of August. In 2001 Alabama experienced two human cases of West Nile virus infection, one of which was fatal.

The Department of Public Health will continue its efforts to inform the public about the importance of personal protection measures individuals can take to reduce their risks of being bitten by infected mosquitoes. In addition, the department will distribute additional information to hospitals and clinics about this disease and the availability of tests for human cases.

WNV and other mosquito-borne viruses such as Eastern Equine Encephalitis are transmitted from bird to mosquito to bird. Occasionally, the same mosquitoes will take

blood from mammals, including humans and horses. Mosquitoes pick up the virus by feeding on the blood of infected birds. The disease cannot be spread from person to person or from animals to people.

Since mosquitoes are commonly found throughout much of Alabama, health officials offer these practical strategies for the mosquito season:

PERSONAL PROTECTION; CLOTHING AND AROMATICS

- Wear loose fitting, light colored clothes to help prevent mosquitoes from reaching the skin and to retain less heat, making yourself less "attractive" to mosquitoes. Mosquitoes are more attracted to dark colors.
- When possible, wear long sleeves and long pants.
- Avoid perfumes, colognes, fragrant hair sprays, lotions and soaps, which attract mosquitoes.

PERSONAL PROTECTION; REPELLENTS

- Follow the label instructions when applying repellents. Permethrin repellents are only for clothes - not for application on the skin.
- When using repellents avoid contact with eyes, lips and nasal membranes.
- Use concentrations of less than 10 percent when applying DEET-containing products on children.
- Apply DEET repellent on arms, legs, and other exposed areas, but never under clothing.
- After returning indoors, wash treated skin with soap and water.
- Citronella candles and repellents containing citronella can help, but their range is limited.
- Herbals such as cedar, geranium, pennyroyal, lavender, cinnamon, and garlic are not very effective.

PERSONAL PROTECTION; AROUND THE HOME

- Mosquito activity peaks at dusk and again at dawn; restrict outdoor activity during these hours.
- Keep windows and door screens in good condition.
- Replace porch lights with yellow light bulbs that will attract fewer insects.
- Mosquitoes breed in standing water; empty all water from old tires, cans, jars, buckets, drums, plastic wading pools, toys, and other containers.
- Clean clogged gutters.
- Remove the rim from potted plants and replace water in plant/flower vases weekly.
- Replenish pet watering dishes daily and rinse bird baths twice weekly.
- Fill tree holes and depressions left by fallen trees with dirt or sand.
- Stock ornamental ponds with mosquito fish or use larvicide "doughnuts."