



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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ADPH announces a second fatality and two additional cases of West Nile virus in Alabama

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health has been notified that a previously reported individual infected with West Nile virus has died as a result of the illness. The fatality occurred in an elderly woman from Montgomery County.

In addition, two additional human cases have occurred in a 58-year-old man from Etowah County and a 75-year-old man from Jefferson County. Both of these individuals are recovering. The new cases bring the total number of West Nile infections in the state to 30, including two fatal cases in elderly women from Montgomery County.

"We are saddened by the death of another Alabama resident. The elderly continue to be the group at highest risk for severe illness from West Nile virus. Individuals must continue to take precautions against being bitten by mosquitoes," said Dr. Charles Woernle, assistant state health officer for disease control and prevention for Alabama.

Cases of West Nile infection are expected to continue until daily temperatures decrease sufficiently to slow mosquito activity. This generally does not occur until the first freeze. West Nile 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 through normal contact or from animals to people. New evidence indicates that the virus can in rare instances be spread through blood transfusions and organ transplants, however, the vast majority of infections are acquired through the bites of infected mosquitoes.

On Sept. 25, the department announced three additional nonfatal cases of West Nile infection in Alabama residents. These cases were 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.

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. Approximately 17 percent of patients that develop encephalitis will die as a result of the illness. Individuals are warned to take 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.

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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."

9/26/02