

Mobile County reports two West Nile virus cases

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The Mobile County Health Department has been advised of laboratory results which indicate two men, one in his 50s and another in his 60s, are receiving treatment for West Nile virus. These are the first reported cases in Mobile County and bring to 11 the number of human cases in the state during 2003. There have been two deaths from the virus in persons in their 80s.

West Nile virus infections in humans have been reported from the following counties: Baldwin, two cases including one fatal case; Blount, one case; Geneva two cases; Marshall, one case; Mobile, two cases; Monroe, one case; Shelby, one case; and Talladega, one fatal case.

West Nile virus and Eastern Equine Encephalitis virus have been detected across a broad geographic region of the state. West Nile virus has thus far been detected in mosquitoes, horses, birds and humans in 21 counties in Alabama. Eastern Equine Encephalitis virus has been detected in mosquitoes, horses, birds and an emu distributed across 18 counties in Alabama.

The cases remind the public of the need to take personal precautionary measures to prevent exposure and reduce the risk of being bitten by infected mosquitoes.

"We continue to be concerned, and we advise Alabamians to take precautions to avoid mosquito bites," said Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer. "All Alabamians should assume that mosquitoes infected with mosquito-borne virus are in their communities and we anticipate additional cases. The risk of disease from mosquito bites will probably increase and only subside when a freeze in late fall kills the mosquitoes."

In 2002 Alabama experienced 49 human cases of West Nile virus infection, three of which were fatal.

Both viruses in humans cause a spectrum of illness ranging from infection without any symptoms to encephalitis involving fever, headache and possibly confusion, disorientation, stupor, tremors, convulsions, paralysis, coma and death. Most people who are infected do not get sick. People with encephalitis are sick enough that they will seek medical care and be hospitalized. The seriousness of an illness may depend on a person's health and age.

West Nile virus affects the elderly most severely and Eastern Equine Encephalitis is most severe in both the young and the elderly. Eastern Equine Encephalitis in humans can have a mortality rate as high as 30 percent, considerably higher than that seen with West Nile encephalitis.

To lower the risk of being bitten by mosquitoes, persons should remember the five D's of Prevention: Dusk, Dawn, Dress, DEET and Drain. Avoid being outside during dawn and dusk

when mosquitoes are most active. Dress to cover your skin with protective clothing. Protect bare skin with mosquito repellent that contains DEET, and drain empty containers holding stagnant water in which mosquitoes breed.

Avoiding mosquito bites and eliminating mosquito-breeding sites will help protect individuals and the community from West Nile virus and Eastern Equine Encephalitis and the other mosquito-borne viruses that occur in Alabama. These viruses are maintained by transmission between birds and mosquitoes.

However, sometimes the viruses spread to humans and other animals by mosquitoes that feed on infected birds and then bite humans and other animals. People contribute to the continuing cycle of these viruses by maintaining environments (especially standing water) in which mosquitoes can lay eggs.

These mosquito-borne viruses are not spread person-to-person, horse-to-person, or horse-to-horse. A person or animal is usually infected through the bite of an infected mosquito. The key to protection is avoiding mosquito bites.

Information about West Nile virus can be found on the ADPH Web site at <http://www.adph.org/westnilevirus/>.

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