



## **NEWS RELEASE**

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## **Eastern Equine Encephalitis detected in South Alabama; first human death from EEE recorded in 2005**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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The public is advised to make every effort to reduce exposure to mosquitoes in the aftermath of Hurricane Dennis. Two human cases of Eastern Equine Encephalitis, EEE, have recently occurred. A man in Escambia County died from EEE and a Baldwin County resident is recovering from EEE. In addition, seven cases of EEE have been confirmed in horses: five in Baldwin County, one in Escambia County and one in Mobile County.

EEE and other mosquito-borne viruses such as West Nile virus are transmitted from bird to mosquito to bird. Mosquitoes can spread these viruses by feeding on the blood of infected birds and then biting another host animal or mammal such as a horse or human. Although humans and horses can become ill from the infection, the diseases cannot be spread from people or horses.

Recent rains and debris that may be keeping water from draining properly heightens the risk for additional human and horse exposures from mosquitoes. "With the recent cases of EEE in horses and humans and the probability of the higher mosquito populations because of localized flooding, it is important that everyone take measures to protect themselves from mosquito-borne viruses such as EEE," State Health Officer Dr. Donald Williamson said. "If you must be outside, use DEET-based repellents and proper clothing to minimize exposure."

To lower the chances of being bitten by mosquitoes, persons should remember the 5 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 Eastern Equine Encephalitis and the other mosquito-borne viruses such as West Nile virus that occur in Alabama. People contribute to the continuing cycle of these viruses by maintaining environments (especially standing water) in which mosquitoes can lay eggs.

EEE in humans causes a clinical spectrum ranging from infection without any symptoms to encephalitis. Encephalitis is an inflammation of the brain. Symptoms include fever, headache, and possibly confusion, disorientation, stupor, tremors, convulsions, paralysis, coma and death. 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. Persons over age 50 and younger than age 15 seem to be at greatest risk for developing severe disease.

EEE is one of the most dangerous mosquito-borne diseases in the U.S. for humans. About one-third of people who become ill with EEE die and another third survive but with mild-to-severe

brain damage. There is no vaccine available for people. In addition to human illness, these viruses also cause illness in livestock, particularly horses. Greater than 90 percent of unvaccinated horses that get EEE die. There is an approved vaccine for horses.

In addition, about one out of three unvaccinated horses can die from West Nile virus infection. There is also a vaccine to prevent West Nile virus infection in horses. Earlier this year there were two horses with WNV in St. Clair County and one in Escambia County.

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