



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Take precautions to prevent mosquito-borne diseases; the season is here

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health advises the public to reduce exposure to mosquitoes. The risk of encephalitis spread by mosquitoes is highest from August through the first freeze in the fall. Alabamians should assume that there are mosquitoes in their community that are infectious for West Nile, Eastern Equine Encephalitis, or one of the other viruses that cause encephalitis.

Humans infected with these viruses generally have no symptoms or mild symptoms. However, if the virus causes encephalitis, an infection of the brain, death or permanent injury can result.

Between June 26 and July 31, the Alabama Department of Public Health received reports of three human cases of infections with mosquito-borne viruses. Two were cases of persons with West Nile encephalitis, one of whom died. One was a human case in which West Nile virus only caused milder symptoms including fever. Infected persons resided in Chambers, Marshall and Mobile counties.

In addition, a horse from Washington County died from Eastern Equine Encephalitis, and blood tests revealed horses from Elmore and Escambia counties were exposed to the EEE virus. Limited testing of mosquitoes and dead birds has detected one case of West Nile virus infection in a raptor from Lee County. Two sentinel chickens each in Baldwin County and Mobile County have tested positive for EEE.

“That these cases came from widely scattered part of the state should alert folks that these viruses could easily be in their own community,” said Dr. J.P. Lofgren, state epidemiologist.

Children under 15 are at increased risk and are more susceptible to encephalitis or serious infection, as are those over age 50. “If citizens want to lower their risk of encephalitis, now is the time to start by taking personal protective actions,” said Dr. Charles Woernle, assistant state health officer for disease control and prevention. “In some parts of Alabama mosquitoes are active throughout the year. West Nile virus and EEE cases have been reported as late as December and even in January.”

Lower the risk of infection from these viruses by following these practical strategies:

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 the 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 activities peak 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.”