



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Alabama West Nile virus cases increase in 2007, with most cases in Montgomery

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health reports that there have been 13 cases of West Nile virus this summer, eight of which have occurred in the City of Montgomery. Three persons with fatal cases of the disease were residents of Butler, Marshall and Montgomery counties.

Dr. Charles Woernle, assistant state health officer for disease control and prevention, said, "We urge the public to follow personal protection and control measures until temperatures decrease enough to slow mosquito activity--when nighttime temperatures reach the fifties."

Mosquitoes spread the virus by first feeding on the blood of infected birds, and later biting a susceptible person. The disease cannot be spread from person to person.

While many people with West Nile virus do not get sick, some people get encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) and require hospitalization. Twelve of the 13 cases involved encephalitis. Symptoms of encephalitis include severe headache, confusion, coma and death.

The age range of patients is from 15 to 86 years. The total of 13 cases so far this year compares with 5 in 2006, 6 in 2005, 15 in 2004, 38 in 2003, and 49 in 2002.

Health officials remind the public of these practical strategies to prevent mosquito bites and mosquito-borne viruses:

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."

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