



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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West Nile virus detected in Escambia County, Ala.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Escambia County, Ala., Health Department announced that a human case of West Nile Virus (WNV) has been detected in Escambia County, Ala. Previously, the virus was detected in five sentinel chickens in Baldwin County. Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) was also detected in two sentinel chickens in June in the Orange Beach area and one sentinel chicken in the Gulf Shores area of Baldwin County. One human case was also diagnosed in Baldwin County in 2008.

“With the approach of fall, many people will be taking advantage of the cooler evenings to enjoy outdoor activities such as sporting events and it is imperative that residents take every effort to reduce their exposure to mosquitoes,” said Administrator Ricky Elliott. “Keep your mosquito repellent with you at all times when you are working or recreating outdoors.”

West Nile Virus, Eastern Equine Encephalitis, and other mosquito-borne viruses are transmitted from bird to mosquito to bird. Occasionally, when bird hosts are scarce, the same mosquitoes will take blood from mammals, including humans and horses. Humans and horses can sometimes become ill from the infection. The likelihood of transmission to humans and horses can be decreased by personal mosquito avoidance and the use of EEE and WNV vaccine in horses. No vaccine is available for humans.

Escambia County Health Department established a mosquito surveillance program in 2008 that includes mosquito trapping and testing and sentinel chicken surveillance. These activities are conducted to monitor for mosquito-borne diseases and track mosquito populations. Serum samples taken each week from the six sentinel chicken flocks are tested for the presence of EEE, WNV and St. Louis encephalitis. In addition to surveillance activities, the department also works to eliminate mosquito breeding sites by providing free larvicide briquettes to the public. Larvicide briquettes are for application in low-lying areas that retain water and ornamental ponds. Larvicide briquettes can be picked up at the Atmore office or the Brewton office.

“It is reasonable to assume that mosquito-borne viruses are likely circulating between mosquitoes and birds in all parts of Escambia County,” Elliott said. “Everyone should try to avoid exposure to mosquitoes.”

Mosquitoes that can spread these viruses among birds are commonly found in urban and suburban communities as well as rural, freshwater swamp areas. They will breed readily in storm sewers, ditches, waste lagoons and in artificial containers around one’s home. Health

officials said it is imperative that homeowners do a careful inspection around their homes to be sure nothing holds water for longer than three days.

Mosquito-borne virus surveillance has been conducted statewide for several years. During that time, EEE, WNV, St. Louis Encephalitis Virus, and La Crosse Encephalitis Virus have been detected. Epidemiologists point out that EEE can be more dangerous to people and other mammals than other mosquito-borne viruses, but that the same mosquito prevention measures reduce exposures to all of them. The health department will continue to notify local officials of test results and recommend methods of prevention.

Since mosquitoes are commonly found throughout much of Alabama, health officials offer practical strategies for the mosquito season:

PERSONAL PROTECTION; CLOTHING AND AROMATICS

1. 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.
2. When possible, wear long sleeves and long pants.
3. Avoid perfumes, colognes, fragrant hair sprays, lotions and soaps, which attract mosquitoes.

PERSONAL PROTECTION; REPELLENTS

1. Follow the label instructions when applying repellents. Permethrin repellents are only for clothes – not for application on the skin.
2. 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
3. Apply DEET repellent on arms, legs and other exposed areas but never under clothing.
4. After returning indoors, wash treated skin with soap and water.
5. 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

1. Mosquito activities peaks at dusk and again at dawn; restrict outdoor activity during these hours.
2. Keep windows and door screens in good condition.
3. Replace porch lights with yellow light bulbs that will attract fewer insects.
4. Mosquitoes breed in standing water; empty all water from old tires, cans, jars, buckets, drums, plastic wading pools, toys, and other containers.
5. Clean clogged gutters.
6. Remove the rim from potted plants and replace water in plant/flower vases weekly.
7. Replenish pet watering dishes daily and rinse bird baths twice weekly.
8. Fill tree holes and depressions left by fallen trees with dirt or sand.
9. Stock ornamental ponds with mosquito fish or use larvicide “doughnuts.”