



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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West Nile virus detected in Baldwin County

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Baldwin County Health Department announced that sentinel chickens from the Fairhope area and the Rabun area have tested positive for West Nile virus (WNV). Although there have been no human cases reported, the positive chickens indicate the virus is present in certain mosquito populations and has the potential to infect humans.

West Nile virus, Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) and other mosquito-borne, also known as arthropod-borne viruses or simply arboviruses, are transmitted by mosquitoes after they feed on birds. The same mosquitoes can then infect mammals, particularly humans and horses. Humans and horses can sometimes become seriously ill from the infection.

“With many people enjoying outdoor activities, it is important that residents take every effort to reduce their exposure to mosquitoes,” said Baldwin County Health Department Environmentalist Rachel Beck. “Keep your mosquito repellent with you at all times when you are working or participating in recreational activities outdoors.”

Baldwin County Health Department conducts a mosquito control program that includes surveillance activities such as mosquito trapping and sentinel chicken surveillance. The surveillance allows early detection of mosquito-borne diseases and tracks positive mosquito populations.

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.

Larvicide briquettes are available free to the public for application in low-lying areas that retain water and ornamental ponds. These briquettes are available at the Baldwin County Health Department Environmental Office in Robertsdale, 22251 Palmer St.; the health department office in Bay Minette, 212 Courthouse Square; and the Baldwin County Animal Control Center, C.R. 49 in Summerdale.

Arboviral surveillance has been conducted in portions of south Alabama for the past 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 cause more severe disease than other arboviruses, but that the same mosquito prevention measures reduce transmission risks of any arboviruses. 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

- 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 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 (fish which eat mosquitoes in their larval and pupal stages) or use larvicidal “doughnuts” which gradually kill mosquitoes.

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