



Colorado Department
of Public Health
and Environment

*"To protect and improve
the health and environment
of the people of Colorado."*

NEWS

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West Nile Virus Season Peaks—Coloradans Urged To Continue Wearing Mosquito Repellent

DENVER-- West Nile virus experts from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Thursday urged Coloradans to continue using mosquito repellent containing DEET, or non-DEET containing alternatives now on the market, to protect themselves from West Nile virus-carrying mosquitoes, as the state's 2005 season is not over.

John Pape, an epidemiologist specializing in animal-related diseases at the Department of Public Health and Environment, said, "Although we've had a late start to the season and a mild year thus far, we have seen a recent surge in positive mosquito pools, horses, birds and human cases around the state. When we start to see this many positive cases come in at once, our experience in the past two years has shown many more cases will follow quickly. We now are at the 'peak' of the season, which will last through Labor Day. We expect to see transmission through the end of September, which is what our experience has been the last few years."

Pape explained that the disease's peak season occurs later in the summer when the peak population of mosquitoes is reached and sufficient numbers of mosquitoes have become infected.

"The reason for the late start and fewer cases thus far is unclear," Pape said, adding that the incidence of West Nile virus will vary throughout regions of the state.

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Pape said, "Our surveillance has shown increasing West Nile virus activity statewide, although no 'hot spots' have shown up as in previous years."

He said that of the 37 positive mosquito pools reported in 2005, 30, or 81 percent, were collected in the past two weeks. Fifty-seven percent of the human cases this year have been reported since August 1, which represents people who became ill in late July. No deaths have been reported.

Pape said, "I expect to see an increasing number of human cases reported in the next few weeks."

To date for 2005, positive West Nile virus cases have included 21 human cases; 37 mosquito pools; eight horses; and 14 birds.

Pape noted that while the recent increase in activity serves as a reminder that West Nile virus is still here and people still need to take precautions, the surveillance data does not indicate that a 2003-level outbreak is imminent.

A total of 291 human cases of West Nile virus, including four deaths, were reported in Colorado in 2004. This represented a sharp downturn from the first full season of West Nile virus in Colorado in 2003, when there were 2,947 confirmed cases of the disease and 63 deaths.

Douglas H. Benevento, the executive director of the Department of Public Health and Environment, reminded Coloradans that the simplest way to reduce the chances of being bitten by virus-carrying mosquitoes is to remember the four D's during West Nile virus season.

He recapped the four D's, which include:

- **DAWN and DUSK** is when mosquitoes that transmit West Nile virus are most active. Limit outdoor activities or use precautions at these times.
- **DRESS** in long-sleeved shirts, pants and other clothing to cover exposed skin if outside during the periods when mosquitoes are active.

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Four D's (cont'd.):

- Use mosquito repellents with **DEET** or non-DEET containing repellents approved by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (products contain picaridin and lemon or eucalyptus oil). Products with 10 percent or less DEET are recommended for children.
- **DRAIN** standing water in tires or similar water-holding containers as these may serve as mosquito breeding sites. Change the water in birdbaths at least weekly.

SYMPTOMS

Benevento explained that most illnesses due to West Nile virus involve fever, headache, body aches, skin rash and muscle weakness.

West Nile virus also can cause paralysis, encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), and meningitis. Serious symptoms may include severe headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, muscle weakness or convulsions. Persons with these symptoms should seek medical attention immediately. In rare cases, it can be fatal.

Benevento said that further information on West Nile Virus can be found at www.FighttheBiteColorado.com or by calling the Colorado Health Education Line for the Public at 1-877-462-2911.

Callers to the hotline will be able to obtain information in English and in Spanish on a wide variety of topics relating to West Nile virus, including:

- Symptoms of the virus. However, hotline operators will not be able to help diagnose whether a person has contracted West Nile virus. Rather, such individuals will be referred to their personal physician for diagnosis and treatment.
- Methods of preventing West Nile virus.
- Information on repellents and how they should be used both on adults and children.
- How pets might be affected by the virus.