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Health Department Warns That West Nile Virus Season is Here

Tri-County Health Department is warning that spring rains and hot summer temperatures are the perfect breeding conditions for mosquitoes that might carry West Nile virus.

“We have learned that the vast majority of people who get West Nile virus are bitten by infected mosquitoes around their own home, not while on an outdoor adventure,” states Richard L. Vogt, MD, Executive Director of Tri-County Health Department. “People must reduce mosquito breeding areas around their home, and also use insect repellent to protect themselves from mosquito bites every time they are outdoors ... whether in the backwoods or in the backyard.”

“For many people West Nile virus infection is not just a ‘mild’ illness. People should take protective measures now to prevent infection from mosquito bites,” adds Vogt.

These recommended mosquito precautions include the five D’s:

- DRAIN all standing water around the house to eliminate any mosquito-breeding sites
- DRESS in long-sleeved shirts, long pants, shoes and socks
- Use mosquito repellents that contain DEET while outdoors
- Avoid outdoor activities at DUSK and DAWN when mosquitoes are most active

The West Nile virus is carried long distances by infected birds and then spread locally by mosquitoes that bite these birds. Infected mosquitoes can then bite and pass the virus to humans. House pets do not become ill if bitten and do not spread the illness, and there is no human-to-human transmission by someone who already has the virus.

Most infections are mild and symptoms can include fever, headache, body aches, skin rashes and swollen lymph nodes. Symptoms usually appear 3 to 14 days after exposure. All residents of areas where West Nile virus activity has been confirmed are at risk, but people over age 50 seem

to be especially vulnerable to the most severe forms of disease.

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

In addition to DEET, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have approved two new ingredients for use in insect repellents — picaridin and oil of lemon eucalyptus.

Extensive information on West Nile virus and these two new insect repellents can be found at the website www.FightTheBiteColorado.com or by calling the toll-free Colorado HelpLine at 1-877-462-2911.

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