

Recommendations to Help Avoid West Nile Virus

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Finally, warm, sunny and sometimes rainy days have reached Southeastern Idaho. Baseball, golf, tennis, and other summertime activities move people outside. Unfortunately, with that comes mosquitoes and West Nile Virus (WNV). During 2006, Idaho led the nation with 996 reported cases, 23 deaths, and in our region, Bingham County was hit particularly hard. Southeastern District Health Department (SDHD) would like to take this opportunity to remind the public about WNV and how to help protect themselves during the upcoming months. WNV is established as a seasonal epidemic in North America that flares up in the summer and continues into the fall.

Personal protection is the key!

Steps the public should take include:

- When outdoors, use insect repellents containing DEET, picaridin, or oil of lemon eucalyptus. Re-apply repellent if mosquitoes start to bite, always following label instructions.
- Many mosquitoes are most active between dusk and dawn. Take extra care to use a repellent and wear long sleeve shirt and pants during this time, or consider avoiding outdoor activities.
- Fix or install window and door screens.
- Eliminate potential mosquito breeding sites by emptying standing water. Change the water in pet dishes daily and replace the water in birdbaths at least weekly. Empty children's wading pools and store on their sides when not in use.

To understand this virus, we have included some overall WNV background information provided by the Center for Disease Control (CDC).

- **WNV Disease.**

The time from mosquito bite to symptoms generally is from three to 14 days. Although most human WNV infections don't cause any symptoms, up to 20 percent of the people who become infected develop symptoms such as fever, headache, body aches, nausea, vomiting, and a skin rash. Most symptoms last only several days, but even healthy people have become sick for several weeks. A smaller number of people develop severe disease, such as inflammation of the brain, the membranes of the brain or spinal cord, or nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord. Signs of severe infection include high fever, stiff neck, disorientation, tremors, muscle weakness, and paralysis. Severe disease is more likely to occur among people age 50 and over. These severe cases may be fatal.

- **The Total Human WNV Cases Reported to CDC**
From 1999 through 2004 there were nearly 17,000 cases of West Nile virus disease reported to CDC, with thousands of the less severe cases likely unreported. Visit www.cdc.gov/westnile for more details.
- **How WNV is spread.**
The most likely route of WNV infection to humans is through the bite of an infected mosquito. In very rare cases, WNV has also been rarely transmitted by organ transplantation and blood transfusion.
- **WNV is here to stay.**
WNV was first reported in the United States in New York State during the summer of 1999. While the number of people affected by the disease and the location of the more intense outbreaks change each season, it is clear that WNV is now established across the United States.
- **Mature adults are at higher risk.**
People age 50 and over have a higher incidence of severe illness or fatal disease caused by WNV. In 2004, more than 60 percent of WNV cases and 95 percent of the deaths due to WNV infection were among people age 50 years and older. Very few cases of WNV disease occur among children.
- **Outdoor workers and recreationists also are at a greater risk of WNV exposure.**
This group includes those working outdoors when mosquitoes are biting, such as farmers, farm workers, foresters, landscapers, groundskeepers, construction workers, mechanics, among many others. People who are gardening, walking, or playing outdoor sports also should be alert to their risk.
- **Tracking WNV.**
Local, State, and Federal agencies are working together to track WNV transmission in mosquitoes, birds, horses, other animals, and humans in the United States.
- **Supporting community-based mosquito control programs.**
Individuals are encouraged to assist their local mosquito control programs. If one does not exist within the community, contact your county commissioners and ask about starting one.

The Department of Health and Welfare has a “Fight the Bite” website that contains a wealth of additional information and can be accessed at www.westnile.idaho.gov.

For more local information, contact Jeff Doerr, 478-6321, Steve Pew, 239-5272 or visit www.sdhdidaho.org.