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Bingham County Reports West Nile Virus Activity

West Nile virus was found in mosquitoes from Bingham County, prompting health officials to remind people to 'Fight the Bite' of mosquitoes when they are outdoors and around their homes. Last year, West Nile virus was discovered in 38 Idaho counties, infecting approximately 1,000 people and contributing to the deaths of 23 people.

West Nile virus is usually spread through the bite of an infected mosquito. West Nile virus does not generally spread from person-to-person or from infected animals to people. "Bingham County led the nation in West Nile infections last year per capita," says Craig Rowland, Bingham County Emergency Manager. "We are encouraging people to protect themselves against the bite of the mosquito."

To protect themselves, people are advised to avoid mosquitoes when they are most active, between dusk and dawn. People also should:

- Cover up exposed skin when outdoors and apply DEET or other EPA-approved insect repellent to exposed skin and clothing. Follow instructions on the product label, especially for children;
- Insect-proof their homes by repairing or replacing screens; and
- Reduce standing water on their property that provides mosquito breeding habitat, such as bird baths and decorative ponds.

West Nile virus does not usually affect most animals, including dogs and cats, but can cause severe illness in horses, llamas and certain species of birds. Although there is not a vaccine available for people, there are several vaccines available for horses. People are advised to contact their veterinarian about vaccinating their horses.

Certain birds adversely affected by West Nile virus include magpies, crows, raptors, ravens and jays. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game will continue testing and documenting dead birds this season. People who find dead birds to are asked to call their local Fish and Game office. Fish and Game is most interested in testing birds that have been dead for less than 48-hours.

For more information, contact Craig Rowland, 782-3191 or Jeff Doerr at Southeastern District Health Department, 478-6321.

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