



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Eastern Equine Encephalitis Detected in Vermont Bird

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BURLINGTON – The Vermont Department of Health and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets announced today that Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) was confirmed on September 22 in an emu from Brandon.

This is the first time that EEE virus has been confirmed in a live animal in Vermont. No cases in people have been reported.

While EEE virus has never caused illness in Vermont, EEE in animals and people had been reported in Vermont's bordering states and Quebec. In 2010, testing of deer and moose samples confirmed that EEE virus was present in Vermont.

EEE is a mosquito-borne virus that is typically spread through the bite of an infected mosquito. Most mosquitoes do not carry the virus, however, the Mosquito Control District in Brandon treated the area around the emu farm to reduce the number of adult mosquitoes.

Erica Berl, DVM, MPH, an infectious disease epidemiologist with the Health Department, has been carefully tracking mosquito-borne disease in Vermont all summer. On September 14, she was notified by the Assistant State Veterinarian in the Agency of Agriculture Joel Russo DVM, about a flock of emus with symptoms suspicious of EEE. The emus began to get sick last week, but the cause of the illness wasn't confirmed until yesterday.

"Emus are extremely sensitive to this virus so it is not unexpected that we found it first in these animals," Dr. Berl said.

In addition to emus, the EEE virus can cause illness in horses, alpacas, llamas and people. There is a vaccine for horses, and horse owners should discuss vaccination with their veterinarians. The majority of people who might be infected with EEE virus will not become ill. Those who become ill will have flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, fatigue, joint and body aches. These symptoms typically last one or two weeks, and recovery is usually complete.

EEE virus has the potential, however to invade the central nervous system (brain and spinal cord) and cause more serious illness. Symptoms of severe disease include fever, intense headache, weakness, poor coordination, irritability, drowsiness and mental status changes. About one-third of people who develop severe EEE disease die, and many who recover are left with disabilities. Fortunately, severe EEE is rare.

"While the risk of illness from this virus is still low in Vermont, it is not zero, so it is important for people to take precautions to prevent mosquito bites," Dr. Berl said.

Fight the Bite!

- Wear long sleeves and pants and avoid outdoor activities at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are active.
- Reduce mosquito breeding habitats by getting rid of standing water, and by draining areas where water can pool such as rain gutters, wading pools, and old tires.
- Use insect repellents that are safe and effective against mosquitoes. Products with a registration number from the Environmental Protection Agency on the label have been evaluated for safety and effectiveness. Repellents containing DEET in concentrations up to 30 percent picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or IR3535 can be used to prevent mosquito bites.
- Install or repair screens on windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out.

For more information on EEE, visit the Vermont Department of Health website at healthvermont.gov.

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For more information visit the [Vermont Agency of Agriculture website](#).

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