



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



First Cases of West Nile Virus

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Take precautions to avoid mosquito-borne viruses after the storm

BURLINGTON – West Nile virus has arrived in Vermont. This mosquito-borne illness is typically reported in the Northeastern U.S. at the end of the summer. The Vermont Department of Health has received two reports of infection in people in recent weeks. This is the first time human cases have been reported in our state since 2003.

One case currently under investigation is in a resident of Addison County. The person was hospitalized but is recovering. Earlier this summer, a Franklin County resident was found to be infected when their blood donation tested positive for West Nile virus. Donated blood is routinely tested for the virus and when found to be positive, as in this case, it is discarded.

West Nile virus has been detected in Vermont most years since surveillance for the virus began in 2000. Over the years, virus has been detected in mosquitoes, dead birds, horses, and a few people. This season, in addition to the human infections, the virus has been detected in two mosquito pools in Brandon and Cornwall, and a total of seven dead birds found in Vernon, Colchester, Essex, Shelburne and Rutland. West Nile virus activity is being seen in most of the state, and the activity is peaking now.

While most people who become infected do not become ill, about 20 percent experience a flu-like illness, and less than 1 percent develop a more severe illness that affects the nervous system. Symptoms of West Nile virus typically include high fever, muscle aches, headache and fatigue. When the nervous system is involved, symptoms may include a stiff neck, severe headache, or a change in mental status.

Take precautions to avoid mosquito bites

Although the risk of becoming ill is low, the Health Department recommends that people take precautions to avoid mosquito bites. If you can, reduce mosquito breeding habitats by getting rid of standing water, and drain areas where water can pool such as rain gutters, wading pools and old tires. However, if your area has been flooded and you can't remove standing water, you can still take steps to prevent mosquito bites.

- Wear long sleeves and pants and avoid outdoor activities at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are active.
- 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%, 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.
- Horses are also susceptible to West Nile virus infection. There is a vaccine available for horses, and horse owners should discuss vaccination with their veterinarians.

For up to date information on health and safety precautions, go to www.healthvermont.gov, and join us there on Twitter and Facebook www.facebook.com/HealthVermont

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