



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Health Department Hunts for EEE during Deer Season



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BURLINGTON – Hunters who met Health Department and Fish & Wildlife officials collecting blood samples from killed deer at 22 check stations during the rifle season were more than willing to pinpoint on the map where they felled their deer.

Even the coveted secret hunting spots.

Mapping the location of deer that test positive for EEE (Eastern Equine Encephalitis) will help to broaden the state's understanding of the spread of the virus.

EEE is a rare disease transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito. There is no human vaccine for EEE. The Health Department and the Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets have been working to detect the virus since it first appeared in the state in a flock of emus in Rutland County in 2011.

Fortunately, in 2013 there were no human cases reported. However, two horses in Franklin County died from the illness, which was the first time the virus had been detected outside of southern Addison and northern Rutland Counties.

EEE antibodies have been detected in deer or moose in every county in Vermont. Fifteen percent of deer blood samples collected last year tested positive for EEE, 7 percent in 2011, and 10 percent in 2010. Deer are bitten by mosquitoes frequently and form antibodies as an immune response without getting seriously ill from EEE.

This year over 700 blood samples were collected and will be analyzed next spring.

By looking for antibodies in the deer and moose, scientists are hoping to see if positive animals are found more commonly near any particular body of water or wetland. Finding a cluster could help focus future surveillance efforts, and could reveal an area of increased risk for people and susceptible animals. So far, no clusters have been detected.

Liz Beeson, a recent graduate of the University of Vermont with a degree in biology, helped the state to collect blood samples this season.

"I'm excited to see the result of the tests," said Beeson "We had so many more samples this year than last year, and it will help us to see if there is a trend. The hunters were really great this year in helping us out."

Visit the Health Department website for more information on EEE at healthvermont.gov.

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