

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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Mosquitoes Positive for West Nile Virus Found in San Juan County First Positive Mosquitoes Found this Year

(Santa Fe) - The New Mexico Department of Health recommends people protect themselves against mosquito bites after mosquitoes in San Juan County tested positive for West Nile Virus at the Department of Health's Scientific Laboratory. The San Juan County mosquito control personnel found mosquitoes positive for West Nile Virus around the Blanco area and sent the mosquitoes to the Department's lab for confirmatory testing. There have been no confirmed human cases of West Nile in New Mexico so far this year.

"We see the most cases of West Nile Virus infection, including fatalities, in August and September," said Paul Ettestad, the Department's public health veterinarian. "Fortunately, it is easy to protect yourself by taking precautions, such as using a repellent when you are outdoors, especially during the evening and early morning when mosquitoes are most active."

The Department has set up a West Nile surveillance system across the state and provides traps, shipping and testing for local mosquito control programs that collect mosquitoes.

"The rains across the state earlier this summer have created numerous breeding sites for mosquitoes," Ettestad said. "Protecting yourself from mosquitoes is especially important as summer progresses and the number of mosquitoes increases."

To protect yourself from West Nile:

- Use insect repellent on exposed skin and clothing when you go outdoors. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends repellents containing DEET, Picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or IR3535 for use on skin, and permethrin for use on clothing. Always follow label directions when using insect repellents.
- When weather permits, wear protective clothing such as loose-fitting, long-sleeved shirts, long pants and socks.
- The hours from dusk to dawn are peak biting times for mosquitoes. Take extra care to use repellent and protective clothing, or avoid outdoor activities during these times.
- Eliminate water-holding containers where mosquitoes lay their eggs, such as old tires, and regularly change the water in birdbaths, wading pools and pet water bowls. Make sure rain barrels are tightly screened.
- Keep windows and doors closed if not screened. If you leave your house doors or windows open, make sure they have screens that fit tightly and have no holes.

- Vaccinate your horses to protect them from West Nile Virus and Western Equine Encephalitis, which is also carried by mosquitoes.

Common West Nile symptoms are fever, nausea, headache, and muscle aches. In rare cases, West Nile Virus can cause meningitis or encephalitis. If someone has these symptoms, they should see their health care provider. People older than 50 are at most risk for serious disease from West Nile Virus.

Both meningitis and encephalitis can be fatal, especially in the elderly. However, most people who become infected have either no symptoms or have only mild symptoms, and less than 1 percent of all people infected, including those who have no symptoms and have not been tested, develop meningitis or encephalitis. Meningitis is an infection of the lining around the brain, while encephalitis is an infection of the brain itself.

In 2008 there were a total of eight cases of West Nile in New Mexico with no fatalities. In 2007, New Mexico had 60 human cases of West Nile with three fatalities. For more information about West Nile, including fact sheets in English and Spanish, go to the Department's website at www.nmhealth.org/epi/wnv.html.

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