

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Secretary Alfredo Vigil, MD

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State Announces First West Nile Virus Fatality of 2009 Department of Health Confirms Two New Cases

(Santa Fe) The New Mexico Department of Health announced today that a 45-year-old man from Doña Ana County died from West Nile Virus infection. The man had encephalitis, the more severe clinical form of the disease, and had been hospitalized since Aug. 1. In addition, a 39-year-old woman from Rio Arriba County tested positive for West Nile fever and is recovering. She became sick Aug. 1 and was not hospitalized.

The state has had a total of three human cases of West Nile Virus so far this year. A 70-year-old man from Eddy County, who has the more severe clinical form of West Nile Virus with both encephalitis and meningitis, remains in critical condition at University of New Mexico Hospital.

“We extend our sympathy to the man’s family and friends who are grieving for their loss,” said Health Secretary Alfredo Vigil, MD. “We have seen West Nile Virus cases in three counties this month, and we all need to do our best to prevent mosquito bites so we’re safe from West Nile.”

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

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