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Dept. of Health Announces West Nile Fever Case in Lea County Woman
Equine Cases also Confirmed in Chaves, Lincoln, Grant, and Colfax Counties

(Las Cruces) -- The New Mexico Department of Health announced today that a 51-year-old woman from Lea County was confirmed with West Nile Virus. She was hospitalized with the less severe form of the disease and is now home recovering.

Four horses have also tested positive for West Nile Virus, one from the Roswell area of Chaves County, one from the Hondo area of Lincoln County, one from the Mimbres area in Grant County, and one from near Springer in Colfax County. The horse from Chaves County died of complications of the infection while the other horses have survived and are recovering.

“Mosquitoes continue to be present across the state due to the recent rainfall,” said Dr. Paul Etestad, the Department of Health’s public health veterinarian. “We urge people to continue to take precautions against mosquito bites until the first frost in their area. There will be positive mosquitoes circulating until that time.”

There have been four human cases of West Nile Virus so far this year in New Mexico including a fatal case in a 45-year-old man from Doña Ana County, a 70-year-old man from Eddy County who had the more severe clinical form of West Nile Virus with both encephalitis and meningitis, and a 39-year-old woman from Rio Arriba County who had West Nile fever and has recovered.

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.

To protect yourself from West Nile Virus:

- 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.

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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