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Health Department Reports First Two Human West Nile Cases in NM in 2010 State Encourages New Mexicans to Protect Themselves Against Mosquitoes

(Santa Fe) – The New Mexico Department of Health announced today that a 67-year-old woman from San Juan County has been diagnosed with West Nile Virus infection. The woman is hospitalized with neurological symptoms, the more severe clinical form of West Nile Virus. This is the first human case of laboratory-confirmed West Nile Virus infection in New Mexico so far this year.

A 47-year-old woman from Doña Ana County also had a positive West Nile Virus test when she donated blood. Later she developed mild symptoms and has recovered. Symptoms are fever, nausea, headache, and muscle aches. In rare cases, West Nile Virus can cause meningitis or encephalitis. If you have these symptoms, you should see your health care provider.

“It’s important to remember that older adults are more susceptible to developing serious complications from West Nile Virus, and they need to be especially careful to avoid mosquito bites,” said the Department of Health’s State Epidemiologist C. Mack Sewell.

Paul Ettestad, the Department’s public health veterinarian, said people should protect themselves by using a repellent when they are outdoors, especially during the evening and early morning when mosquitoes are most active. “Because of the large amounts of rainfall New Mexico received in late July and early August, mosquito populations are increasing and we should expect West Nile Virus activity throughout the state,” Ettestad said.

New Mexico typically sees most of its West Nile cases in August and September. There were eight human cases of West Nile each year in 2009 and 2008.

To protect yourself from West Nile:

- Use insect repellent on exposed skin and clothing when you go outdoors.
- Take extra care to use repellent and protective clothing, or avoid outdoor activities during dusk to dawn, peak biting times for mosquitoes.
- Empty or 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.
- Have screens on your windows and doors or keep them closed.
- Vaccinate your horses.

For more information about West Nile Virus, including fact sheets in English and Spanish, go to the Department's website at <http://nmhealth.org/ERD/HealthData/westnile.shtml>.

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