



MAFES Dawg Tracks

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Protection
from West Nile Virus



Mississippi has been fortunate in a sense. In 2009, there were only 53 cases of West Nile Virus recorded. Thus far in 2010, at this writing, we have had two cases: one in Coahoma County and the other in Winston County. July, August, and September are the peak months for mosquito reproduction and for the West Nile Virus, but you can contact it any time of the year.

WHAT IS WEST NILE VIRUS? –

West Nile virus belongs to a family of viruses called Flaviviridae. It is spread by mosquitoes that have fed on the blood of infected birds. It is closely related to the viruses that cause Dengue fever (common in Central and South America), Yellow fever and St. Louis encephalitis.

HOW DO YOU GET INFECTED WITH WEST NILE VIRUS? –

Evidence shows that many people infected with West Nile virus got it from a bite of an infected mosquito. A mosquito gets infected with the WN virus when it feeds on the blood of an infected bird. In about two weeks, the mosquito becomes capable of passing the virus to people and animals by biting them. There is some evidence that the female mosquito can pass the virus to its offspring. Researchers are still trying to verify this.

WHO IS MORE LIKELY TO BECOME INFECTED WITH THE WN VIRUS? –

Evidence has shown that many people with the WN virus have mild symptoms and some have no symptoms at all. People with weaker immune systems, people over 40 years old and those with chronic diseases are at a greater risk for serious health effects. But people of any age are susceptible to the severe illness if they are bitten. This is why it is so important to avoid mosquito bites if they are active in your neighborhood, town or region.

The WN virus is transferred back and forth between a mosquito and a bird reservoir (the host). Although humans and mammals can be infected with the virus, they are not part of the transmission cycle in nature. Many bird species carry the virus, but it is virulent in the crow and jays in the U.S. As a result, crow deaths serve as a potential indicator of WN virus activity in a region. The virus has been found in 150 different bird species in North America and in approx. 74 species of mosquitoes.

SEASON OF THE GREATEST RISK –

The risk of getting infected is greatest during the mosquito season, which in Mississippi occurs during July, August, and September, but can happen anytime during the year.

PREVENTION AND CONTROL –

- Minimizing mosquito attacks on people is currently the only effective prevention of WNV. This is achieved by use of insect repellants when outdoors and eliminating the breeding sites on your property and in your neighborhoods.
- Mosquito, horse, sentinel animal, and human populations may also be monitored for the presence of WNV and other arboviruses by state agencies. Surveillance is intensified if the area is already affected or if an area adjacent to it is infected.
- Area-wide control can best be handled by local municipalities and mosquito control agencies.
- Eliminating mosquito breeding sites is the most effective way to reduce the population and lessen the threat. Removing water holding vessels, or maybe engineered water sites, may be the answer - depending upon the circumstances.

WAYS TO REDUCE YOUR RISK OF BEING INFECTED –

- Avoid outdoor activities between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are likely to be biting.
- If you have to be outdoors when mosquitoes are active, cover up by wearing shoes, socks, long pants and long-sleeved shirts.
- Apply mosquito repellant to exposed skin and on clothing. An effective repellant will contain DEET (n-diethyl-m-toluidide) as an active ingredient. Follow directions on the label for use, and take special precautions with children. Studies have proven that other repellants are less effective. Ultrasonic devices, “bug zappers,” and purple martins are not effective in preventing mosquito bites.
- Maintain screening on windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out of buildings.

ELIMINATE MOSQUITO BREEDING SITES –

- Remove all discarded tires from the property.
- Empty standing water from buckets, tin cans, plastic containers, flower pots, or similar water-holding containers.
- Make sure roof gutters drain properly. Clean clogged gutters in the spring and fall.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools and hot tubs. If not in use, keep empty and covered.
- Change the water in bird baths at least once a week.
- Turn over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use.
- Eliminate all standing water on your property.
- Encourage your neighbors to eliminate breeding sites on their property.
- Alert health authorities to potential breeding sites in your

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