



## **Press Release**

**June 16, 2009**

### **Protection Urged against West Nile Virus**

**Galveston County** – Summertime is here and people are spending more time outdoors which has prompted the Galveston County Health District to remind them that it is also West Nile virus (WNV) season. While WNV can be detected all year long it is most prevalent in the warmer summer months.

Recently the Texas Department of State Health Services confirmed that the first positive WNV mosquito pool was identified in Harris County. At this time there have been no human cases identified this season in the state or in Galveston County. The last identified human case of West Nile virus infection in the county occurred in 2007.

West Nile virus is a mosquito borne disease that can cause encephalitis, a brain infection. Mosquitoes acquire the virus from birds and pass it on to other birds, animals and people.

One of the first lines of defense against the illness, health officials say, is using insect repellants containing EPA-registered agents such as DEET or Picaridin.

Because West Nile virus is now part of our environment, residents are encouraged to help eliminate mosquito breeding sites and prevent mosquito-borne diseases. Some of the things that can be done include:

- Removing and emptying any containers that can hold water. Flowerpots, tires, children's toys etc. Birdbath water should be changed at least once a week.
- Sweep up lawn clipping, leaves and tree limbs from sidewalks and driveways to keep storm drains working efficiently.
- Make sure screens and windows and doors are in good condition.
- Wear long pants and long sleeved shirts when outdoors, most importantly at dawn and dusk.
- When outdoors, use an insect repellant containing a recommended repellant. Products containing these active ingredients typically provide

reasonably long-lasting protection; DEET, Picaridin, Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus, or IR3535. It should be noted that the label for products containing oil of lemon eucalyptus specifies that they should not be used on children under the age of three years. CDC information on repellants can be found at [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/qa/insect\\_repellent.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/qa/insect_repellent.htm).

All of the recommended mosquito repellants are effective in helping prevent West Nile virus, but there are precautions that should be followed when using them:

- Apply repellants only to exposed skin and/or clothing (as directed on the product label). Do not use under clothing.
- Never use repellants over cuts, wounds, or irritated skin.
- Do not apply to eyes or mouth, and apply sparingly around ears. Do not spray directly on face – spray on hands first and then apply to face.
- Do not allow children to handle product. When applying on children, apply to your own hands first and then put it on the child. You may not want to apply to children's hands.
- Use just enough repellant to cover exposed skin and clothing.
- After returning indoors, wash treated skin with soap and water or bathe.
- If you or your child gets a rash or other bad reaction from an insect repellant, stop using it and wash the repellant off with mild soap and water. If you go to a doctor because of the repellant, take the repellant with you to show the doctor.

GCHD in past years has collected dead birds and tested them for the virus to determine when the virus enters the county. Now that WNV is an annual occurrence and known to be seasonally present in our environment, there is no longer a need to test dead birds. If a person needs to dispose of a dead bird they should avoid direct contact by using gloves or by using an inverted plastic bag to pick up the carcass and place it in a garbage bag to be disposed of in their routine trash.

County Health Authority Dr. Mark Guidry says, "Our message is still the same. Be aware of West Nile virus and take precautions to avoid exposure to mosquitoes."

For more information the public is encouraged to visit the CDC web site at: [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/) or call Galveston County Health District Epidemiology Services at (409) 938- 2322.

*(**News Media:** For more information contact Kurt Koopmann, GCHD Public Information Officer, (409) 938-2211)*