West Nile Virus Prevention Remains Important

May 26, 2011

Residents should remember to protect themselves from West Nile virus when the warmer days of summer arrive, according to a Wyoming Department of Health representative.

"No one should think the low case numbers Wyoming has seen in recent years means this disease is gone forever," said Emily Thorp, surveillance epidemiologist with the Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program at the Wyoming Department of Health. "West Nile virus activity in any given year is quite difficult to predict."

West Nile virus (WNV) can cause potentially serious illness in humans. Mosquitoes spread the virus by feeding on infected birds and then biting people, other birds and animals. Wyoming has seen human cases of WNV reported as early as May and as late as October with late summer and early fall as the typical peak times.

Last year Wyoming had the lowest number of human WNV infection cases reported since 2002 with 6 human cases and no deaths. There were 12 human cases with 1 death in 2009; 10 human cases with no deaths in 2008; 185 human cases with 2 deaths in 2007; 65 human cases with 2 deaths in 2006; and 12 human cases with 2 deaths in 2005.

"Preventing mosquito breeding and avoiding mosquito bites are common-sense steps everyone should take," Thorp said.

Thorp recommended the "5 D's" of prevention:

- 1) DAWN and 2) DUSK Most mosquito species prefer to feed at dawn or dusk, so avoid spending time outside during these times.
- 3) DRESS Wear shoes, socks, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt outdoors or when mosquitoes are most active. Clothing should be light-colored and made of tightly woven materials.
- 4) DRAIN Mosquitos breed in shallow, stagnant water. Reduce the amount of standing water by draining and/or removing it.
- 5) DEET Use an insect repellent containing DEET (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide). When using DEET, be sure to read and follow the label instructions. Other insect repellents such as Picaridin (KBR 3023) or oil of lemon eucalyptus can also be effective.

Steps recommended for property owners to reduce mosquito breeding grounds:

- Use smart landscaping to eliminate standing water.
- Repair failed septic tanks.
- Dispose of containers that collect water such as tin cans, ceramic pots, or plastic containers.
- Remove or discard old tires.
- If you cannot dispose of old tires, drill holes to allow water to drain.
- For containers such as bird baths or troughs, replace water at least once a week.
- Repair leaky water pipes and outdoor faucets.
- Ensure that roof gutters drain properly.
- Turn over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use.
- Cover trash containers.

- Aerate ornamental ponds or stock with predatory fish.
- Clean and chlorinate outdoor swimming pools even when not in use.
- Keep drains, ditches, and culverts free of grass clippings, weeds, and trash.
- Remove vegetation and debris from ornamental pond edges.