News from the Wyoming Department of Health

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Take Steps to Avoid Mosquitoes and West Nile Virus

Despite low numbers of reported cases in Wyoming over the last few years, a Wyoming Department of Health representative is reminding residents to protect themselves from West Nile virus as warmer weather arrives across the state.

"West Nile virus activity in any given year is tough to predict," said Emily Thorp, surveillance epidemiologist with the Wyoming Department of Health. "We don't want people to think the low case numbers we've seen recently means this disease is definitely gone forever."

Three human West Nile virus (WNV) infection cases were reported in Wyoming last year. There were 6 human cases and no deaths in 2010; 12 human cases with 1 death in 2009; 10 human cases with no deaths in 2008; and 185 human cases with 2 deaths in 2007. The year of highest WNV activity in Wyoming was 2003 with 393 human cases and nine deaths. The state 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.

West Nile virus (WNV) can cause potentially serious illness in humans. Because mosquitoes spread the virus by feeding on infected birds and then biting people, other birds and animals, preventing mosquito breeding and avoiding bites are the primary prevention strategies.

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 - Mosquitoes 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 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.