

News from the Wyoming Department of Health

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Take Steps to Prevent West Nile Virus Infection

A Wyoming Department of Health representative is reminding residents to take precautions against West Nile virus as Wyoming's warmer months approach.

"It's not too early to start preventing mosquito breeding around your home and on your property and to begin avoiding mosquito bites," said Emily Thorp, surveillance epidemiologist with the Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program at the Wyoming Department of Health.

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. Over the past several years, 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.

In Wyoming last year there were just 10 human West Nile virus cases with no deaths reported. There were 185 human cases with 2 deaths in 2007; 65 human cases with 2 deaths in 2006; 12 human cases with 2 deaths in 2005; 10 human cases with no deaths in 2004; and 393 human cases with 9 deaths in 2003.

"No one should let last year's low number of cases fool them into thinking they don't have to consider this disease any more," Thorp said. "West Nile virus activity has proven very difficult to predict from year to year, so prevention is always important."

The "5 D's" of preventing West Nile Virus are:

- 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 when spending time outdoors or when mosquitoes are most active. Clothing should be light-colored and made of tightly woven materials to keep mosquitoes away from the skin.
- 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). Products containing DEET should be used properly. When using DEET, be sure to read and follow the instructions on the product's label. Other insect repellents such as Picaridin (KBR 3023) or oil of lemon eucalyptus are also highly effective.

Property owners should also take actions to reduce mosquito breeding grounds:

- Use smart landscaping to eliminate standing water that collects.
- 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 in them to allow water to drain.
- For containers such as bird baths or troughs, replace all of the 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 to keep water out.
- Aerate ornamental ponds or stock them 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 so water will drain properly.
- Remove vegetation and debris from the edge of ornamental ponds.

More information about West Nile virus from the Wyoming Department of Health can be found online at www.badskeeter.org.

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