

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **Health Department Urges Public to Take Steps to Prevent West Nile Virus**

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) reminds residents of the importance of protecting themselves and their families from mosquito bites. While there have not been any human cases of West Nile virus reported to the NDDoH so far this year, the department expects that it will be only a matter of time before the first case is identified.

Most people infected with West Nile virus experience no symptoms or have only mild symptoms, such as fever and headache. However, the more serious form of the illness, West Nile neuroinvasive disease, can cause symptoms of high fever, severe headache, stiff neck, altered mental status, and death. People over age 50 or those who have underlying health issues are at greater risk for developing the neuroinvasive disease than others.

“West Nile virus is a concern in North Dakota. In 2015, 23 North Dakota residents tested positive for West Nile virus. Eight of those people were hospitalized, and one person died,” said Michelle Feist, epidemiologist with the NDDoH. “West Nile virus disease can affect anyone and cause serious illness regardless of age. Last year, the family of the young woman who died from West Nile virus publically acknowledged her death to raise awareness about the seriousness of West Nile virus and how to prevent the disease. The family will be doing that again at a community West Nile awareness event on Saturday, June 4, 2016.”

Preventing mosquito bites is the most effective way to avoid West Nile virus disease. There is no human vaccine for West Nile virus, and there are no specific treatments for the disease. NDDoH recommends residents take these precautions to avoid mosquito bites:

- Use insect repellent registered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that contains ingredients such as DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus (or PMD) or permethrin. Always follow the directions on the manufacturer’s label for safe and effective use.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and socks when outdoors.

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- Limit outdoor activities between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most likely to bite.
- Eliminate stagnant water in containers around homes where mosquitoes can lay their eggs (e.g., gutters, buckets, flower pots, old tires, wading pools, and birdbaths).
- Keep mosquitoes from entering your home by installing or repairing screens on windows and doors.

Dancia Jackson, 23, of St. Michael, N.D., died as a result of neurological infection due to West Nile virus. Dancia's mother, Darcie Delorme, has organized a Community West Nile Awareness Day in St. Michael, N.D., on June 4, 2016. The agenda includes an opening prayer, a presentation from the NDDoH, a run/walk, a balloon release, and a community feed. The event will begin at 10:00 a.m. at the St. Michael's Wellness Center in St. Michael, N.D. Everyone is welcome to attend.

In addition to human surveillance, the NDDoH West Nile virus surveillance program will include trapping and testing mosquitoes, reporting and testing sick animals, monitoring illness in humans, and reporting and testing dead birds. For more information about West Nile virus and the 2016 surveillance activities, contact Michelle Feist, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378 or visit [www.ndhealth.gov/wnv](http://www.ndhealth.gov/wnv).

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