



NEWS RELEASE

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Preventing Mosquito Bites Is Key to Avoiding West Nile Virus

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) reminds residents that preventing mosquito bites is the most effective way to avoid West Nile virus disease. 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 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.

“West Nile virus disease can affect anyone and cause serious illness regardless of age,” said Laura Cronquist, epidemiologist with the NDDoH. “In 2016, 85 North Dakota residents tested positive for West Nile virus. Cases ranged in age from younger than ten years to older than 60 years. Twenty-eight of the cases were hospitalized, and two people died.”

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.
- 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.

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In addition to human surveillance, the NDDoH West Nile virus surveillance program includes trapping and testing mosquitoes, reporting and testing sick animals, monitoring illness in humans and reporting and testing dead birds. New to the program this year is an iNaturalist project called *Mosquitoes in North Dakota*. The general public is encouraged to participate in the project by recording observations of mosquitoes found within the state. *Mosquitoes in North Dakota* can be found at <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/mosquitoes-in-north-dakota>.

For more information about West Nile virus and the 2017 surveillance activities, contact Laura Cronquist, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378 or visit www.ndhealth.gov/wnv.

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