

NEWS RELEASE

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For More Information, Contact:
Laura Cronquist
Phone: 701.328.2378
E-mail: lcronquist@nd.gov

State Health Department Reports First West Nile Virus-Related Death in 2017

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) announced today the state’s first West Nile virus-related death in 2017. The individual was a woman who resided in central North Dakota and was older than 60 years of age. She had underlying medical conditions and died while hospitalized.

Most people infected with West Nile virus experience no symptoms or have only mild symptoms, such as fever and headache. In more severe types of infection, the virus can cause high fever, severe headache, stiff neck, altered mental state, and death. People with these symptoms should see a healthcare provider immediately.

“People older than 60 years, or those who have underlying health issues are at the greatest risk of developing a severe illness due to West Nile virus infection. This death is a tragic reminder of how dangerous West Nile virus can be,” said Laura Cronquist, an epidemiologist with the North Dakota Department of Health. “West Nile virus transmission typically peaks in late summer in North Dakota. Until there is a hard frost to get rid of the remaining mosquito population, people should continue to take steps to protect themselves from mosquito bites.”

To date, 29 human West Nile virus cases have been reported in 16 counties this year. Twelve of the 29 cases were hospitalized. In 2016, North Dakota had 85 cases and two West Nile virus-related deaths. Twenty-eight cases were hospitalized last year.

Because the evenings are getting cooler and it has been a dry year, people may be inclined to skip mosquito protection. It remains critical, however, to reduce the risk of being bitten by mosquitoes that may carry West Nile virus. The NDDoH recommends the following precautions:

- Use insect repellents containing ingredients registered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – such as DEET, picaridin, or IR3535. Always follow the directions on the manufacturer’s label for safe and effective use. Do not use insect repellent on babies younger than two months old.

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- If you are also using sunscreen, apply sunscreen first and EPA-registered insect repellent second.
- When possible, wear long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and socks while outside.
- Treat items, such as boots, pants, socks, and tents, with permethrin or buy permethrin-treated clothing and gear.
- Limit outdoor activities between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most likely to bite.
- Eliminate stagnant water and leaf debris in containers around homes where mosquitoes can lay their eggs (e.g., gutters, buckets, flowerpots, old tires, wading pools and birdbaths).
- Keep mosquitoes from entering your home by installing and maintaining screens in windows and doors.
- Keep the grass around your home trimmed.

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

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