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Contact: Gary Sky, Public Information Officer, 720-200-1529

Tri-County Health Department Warns That West Nile Virus Season is Here

Now that West Nile virus has been detected in mosquitoes in multiple areas across Colorado, Tri-County Health Department is urging people to protect themselves from mosquito bites and to eliminate mosquito breeding areas around their home.

Health departments trap and test mosquitoes across the state weekly. Tri-County Health Department has identified West Nile virus in one sample of trapped mosquitoes in Adams County. Positive mosquitoes have now been reported in Adams, Delta, Larimer and Weld Counties. There have been no human cases reported so far this year in Colorado, but it is early in the season, and human cases of West Nile virus usually occur in mid-summer to early fall.

“Spring rains and hot summer temperatures are the perfect breeding conditions for mosquitoes, and testing mosquitoes for West Nile virus is an early warning system for human cases. These positive results indicate that the virus is now in the Denver metro area and that people need to protect themselves from mosquito bites,” states Richard L. Vogt, MD, Executive Director of Tri-County Health Department.

“The vast majority of people who get West Nile virus are bitten by infected mosquitoes around their own home and community, not while on an outdoor adventure,” states Vogt. “Therefore, it is crucial that people reduce mosquito breeding areas around their home, and also use insect repellent and protective clothing to prevent mosquito bites every time they are outdoors—whether in the backwoods or in their own back yard.”

Mosquito breeding is not limited to ponds and streams, so eliminating even small amounts of standing water around the house weekly is a good prevention measure. People should use simple, but effective, protective measures to prevent infection from mosquito bites. These mosquito precautions include the five D’s:

- **DRAIN** standing water in your yard, since that’s where mosquitoes lay eggs. Drain tires and tire swings, tin cans, flower pots, clogged rain gutters, wheelbarrows, watering cans, pet dishes, bird baths, toys and puddles

- **DRESS** in long-sleeved shirts, long pants, shoes and socks
- **DEET** and picaridin are effective ingredients to look for in insect repellents. Always follow label instructions carefully.
- **DUSK** and **DAWN** are when mosquitoes that carry the virus are most active, so limit outdoor activities or take precautions to prevent mosquito bites.

The West Nile virus is carried long distances by infected birds and then spread locally by mosquitoes that bite these birds. Infected mosquitoes can then bite and pass the virus to humans.

The symptoms of West Nile virus infection include fever, headache, weakness, stiff neck, and a rash. Symptoms usually appear 3 to 14 days after exposure. Anyone who develops symptoms of West Nile virus infection should contact a health care provider.

House pets do not become ill if bitten and do not spread the illness, and there is no human-to-human transmission by someone who already has the virus. Horses are susceptible to West Nile virus, but there is an effective vaccine available. There is no vaccine for humans.

Extensive information on West Nile virus, including a Home and Garden Checklist, can be found at www.FightTheBiteColorado.com. Information is also available by calling the toll-free statewide InfoLine, 1-877-462-2911.

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Media Resources:

Main website: www.fightthebitecolorado.com

Home and Garden Checklist: www.fightthebitecolorado.com/home.pdf

Downloadable "No Mosquito" logo: www.fightthebitecolorado.com/downloadable.htm

Toll-free InfoLine: 1-877-462-2911