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First West Nile Virus Case Confirmed in Arapahoe County

Tri-County Health Department has confirmed that a woman in Eastern Arapahoe County has tested positive for West Nile virus. This is the first confirmed case in Arapahoe County in 2008. The 40-year-old woman was diagnosed with viral meningitis, which is swelling of the lining of the brain and/or spinal cord. She was most likely exposed at home and is currently hospitalized.

“The vast majority of people who get West Nile virus are bitten by infected mosquitoes around their own home, not while on an outdoor adventure,” states Richard L. Vogt, MD, Executive Director of Tri-County Health Department. “This most recent case is a good reminder for everyone to avoid all mosquito bites as much as possible. 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. Common household items that can hold enough water for mosquitoes to breed include flowerpots and saucers; clogged rain gutters; wheelbarrows; watering cans; tires and tire swings; sandbox toys; tin cans; and jars. Pet water bowls should be cleaned daily and birdbaths and wading pools should be hosed out weekly.

Vogt urges that people should use simple, but effective, protective measures to prevent infection from mosquito bites. These recommended mosquito precautions include the five D’s:

- DRAIN all standing water around the house to eliminate any mosquito-breeding sites
- DRESS in long-sleeved shirts, long pants, shoes and socks
- Use mosquito repellents that contain DEET while outdoors

- Avoid outdoor activities at DUSK and DAWN when mosquitoes are most active

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. 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.

Although most infections are mild and symptoms can include fever, headache, body aches, skin rashes and swollen lymph nodes, serious illness can occur. Symptoms usually appear 3 to 14 days after exposure. All residents of areas where West Nile virus activity has been confirmed are at risk, but people over age 50 seem to be especially vulnerable to the most severe forms of disease.

Signs of more severe illness may include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, muscle weakness or convulsions. Persons with these symptoms should seek medical attention immediately, because West Nile virus can also cause paralysis, encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) and/or meningitis (inflammation of the brain's lining). In some cases, it can be fatal.

Extensive information on West Nile virus can be found on the Tri-County Health Department website at www.tchd.org, at www.FightTheBiteColorado.com or by calling the toll-free statewide InfoLine, 1-877-462-2911.

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Media Resources:

Main website: www.fightthebitecolorado.com

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

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

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