

West Nile virus season is here

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

The recent flooding and high temperatures across northeast Colorado have produced what appears to be a bumper crop of mosquitoes, which should be a reminder that West Nile virus season is here.

According to officials at the Northeast Colorado Health Department the mosquito populations are high, due in part to recent flooding and hot summer temperatures. While the types of mosquitoes that are currently being trapped are not common carriers of West Nile virus, that trend will probably be changing within the next week.

“A lot of what we’re seeing right now is the *Aedes* species of mosquitoes, which is not a typical carrier of West Nile virus,” said Julie McCaleb, environmental health director for NCHD. “However, data over the past couple of years tells us that late June and early July is when we start to see a rise in the *Culex* mosquito populations, which is the most efficient carrier of the virus. If you haven’t been taking steps to prevent mosquito bites, now is definitely the time to do so.”

Community members can play a big part in helping to decrease their risk of West Nile virus by practicing the following tips:

—Avoid outdoor activities at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active. If people are outside during the periods when mosquitoes are most active, 7 p.m. to midnight, cover up by wearing long-sleeved shirts, pants, shoes and socks.

—Use mosquito repellents containing DEET. Products with up to 30 percent DEET are recommended for children over 2 months of age and adults. Products containing over 50 percent DEET do not offer longer protection. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is also recommending products containing Picaridin, which provides protection equal to that of DEET, or oil of lemon eucalyptus, which provides protection equal to lower concentrations of DEET. Both have been approved by the Environmental Protection Agency. Oil of lemon eucalyptus should not be used on children under 3 years of age.

—Eliminate standing water in tires or similar water-holding containers, as these may serve as

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mosquito breeding sites. Change the water in birdbaths and pet dishes every three to five days.

—If there is standing water around a home that you cannot drain consider using larvicide. Larvicide can be placed directly in water and it kills mosquito larvae before they have a chance to hatch. It comes in a variety of forms, from briquettes to sprays, and many types are nontoxic.

NCHD is currently conducting mosquito surveillance in Sterling and collecting data from Fort Morgan. Surveillance activities include trapping the mosquitoes, separating them by species, counting them, and sending them in to laboratories for testing.

Current data is showing an increase in the number of Culex mosquitoes, and while there have been no positive mosquito pools yet, that doesn't mean the virus isn't present.

“We say every year that we can't predict what this virus will do,” said McCaleb. “The surveillance data gives us some information, but there have been many years where we've had positive human cases before we've had mosquito pools test positive. What we know is that the virus is here to stay and it's important that people realize that the precautions they take themselves are the best defense against this preventable disease.”

West Nile virus is transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito. While not everyone that gets bit by an infected mosquito will become ill, it can lead to very serious illness in some, including chronic disability and death.

If someone has been bitten by a mosquito and experiences a fever, disorientation, muscle weakness, neck stiffness, headache or nausea they should consider seeing their medical provider. If symptoms get worse or one begins to experience any sensory changes, such as blurry vision, sensitivity to light or noise, dizziness or difficulty moving or speaking, contact the medical provider immediately.

For more information about West Nile virus and how to help prevent it, call the Northeast Colorado Health Department, 1-877-795-0646, or visit them online at www.nchd.org. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment also has information online at www.fightwv.org

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