



South Central District Health

Keeping your family & community healthy
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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District Health Announces Third West Nile Death in South Central Idaho

South Central District Health today received confirmation that a Minidoka County resident over the age of 70 has died from West Nile virus. The man represents the fifth death of an elderly person and the sixth death associated with West Nile virus in Idaho this year.

“We are saddened to hear of another resident of our area who has died from West Nile virus,” said Cheryl Juntunen, South Central District Health Director. “We continue to urge people to take extra precautions to protect themselves from mosquito bites while they enjoy the great outdoors this summer. People are especially encouraged to use mosquito repellent containing DEET and wear long sleeves and long pants when mosquitoes are most active at dawn and dusk.”

As of August 18, according to the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare’s West Nile website (www.westnile.idaho.gov), 327 Idaho residents have tested positive for West Nile virus in 2006, with 39 of those reported with neuroinvasive disease, a serious form of the illness. In addition to human cases, 182 horses and 89 birds have tested positive for the disease. So far this year, 30 Idaho counties have reported West Nile activity, including Blaine, Camas, Cassia, Gooding, Jerome, Lincoln, Minidoka, and Twin Falls counties. Statistics reported on the www.westnile.idaho.gov website are updated daily.

In addition to the Minidoka County man, three men from Elmore County and a woman from Lincoln County, all over the age of 70, have died from West Nile virus this summer. Also, a Massachusetts youth who tested positive for both West Nile virus and Rocky Mountain spotted fever died. He became infected with both diseases while attending a youth camp in Gooding County.

“Just like the rest of the nation, West Nile has become part of our ecosystem,” said Dr. Leslie Tengelsen, deputy state epidemiologist. “If you see mosquitoes, you should consider that they may carry West Nile and take precautions to avoid their bite.” She says people across southern Idaho should consider West Nile to be as close as the mosquitoes in their backyards.

To protect themselves from mosquito bites, she advises people to:

- Apply insect repellent approved by the EPA to exposed skin and clothing, re-applying at the recommended intervals. Follow instructions on the product label, especially for children. DEET is not recommended for use on children under 2 months of age.
- Cover up exposed skin when outdoors by wearing long-pants and long-sleeved shirts;
- Avoid mosquitoes when they are most active at dawn and dusk;
- Insect-proof homes by repairing or replacing screens;
- Reduce standing water on property that provides mosquito breeding habitat, such as bird baths and decorative ponds; and
- Report dead birds to your local Fish and Game office.

West Nile Virus: Signs and Symptoms

West Nile virus is transmitted by mosquitoes and has spread across all of the US over the past three years. Most human infections of West Nile virus are mild with 80% having no symptoms. Approximately 20 percent of those infected develop a generally mild West Nile fever that begins from 3 to 14 days after infection and can last from a few days to several weeks.

Symptoms of West Nile fever often include fever, headache, body aches, tiredness, skin rash, occasional eye pain, and enlarged lymph nodes. Less than one percent of people infected (about 1 in 150) develop the more serious neuroinvasive form of the disease, of which symptoms can include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, and paralysis. Those over age 50 are more susceptible to serious complications from the virus, but serious illness can occur in people of any age.

People are encouraged to consult their health care provider if they have concerns about their health. Although there is no treatment against the virus, supportive therapy and treatment of symptoms is usually followed until the patient recovers. Health care providers can determine if a blood test is needed to verify West Nile infection symptoms. The test is only recommended for those with the neuroinvasive disease. Physicians and laboratories are responsible for reporting confirmed cases of West Nile infection to public health agencies.

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