

By Carolyn Lee

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Celebrating the Fourth of July also means spending time outdoors which increases your chances of mosquito and other bug bites.

“West Nile Virus is synonymous with summer in Nebraska. It shows up every season and taking steps to protect yourself should be part of your routine,” according to Dr. Joseph Acierno, Director of Public Health and Chief Medical Officer for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

West Nile Virus is transmitted to people through the bite of a mosquito that picked up the virus by feeding on an infected bird.

DHHS started its West Nile Virus surveillance at the beginning of June.

That includes six mosquito breeding sites in Chase County—three in Imperial and three in or around Enders, according to Heidi Wheeler, Emergency Response Coordinator for Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department.

DHHS surveillance efforts include trapping mosquitoes, collecting dead birds and testing for human infection.

The Nebraska Department of Agriculture investigates any possible cases involving horses.

All human cases are investigated by DHHS and the local public health departments. In this area that’s Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department

So far this season one mosquito pool in Scottsbluff County tested positive for the virus. No birds have tested positive and there are no human cases reported yet.

Last year at this point there were 193 human cases in Nebraska and four deaths.

Since West Nile showed up in 2002 there have been 52 deaths reported. The majority of those were in 2003, when 27 people died, according to statistics from DHHS.

Most people who are infected will have no symptoms or only mild flu-like symptoms. Some people will develop a fever with other symptoms like headache, body aches, vomiting, fatigue and weakness.

Less than one percent of people will develop a serious illness like encephalitis or meningitis (inflammation of the brain and surrounding tissues).

People over 50 and those with weakened immune systems are especially vulnerable to the disease and are more likely to experience serious consequences.

One of the best defences of preventing West Nile Virus is to apply mosquito repellent when spending time outdoors. That allows you to continue to play, work and enjoy the outdoors with a lower risk of getting bit.

Apply repellent when you go outdoors, even if it’s only for a few minutes. The most effective repellents contain DEET.

Other precautions include dressing in long-sleeved shirts, pants and socks when you’re outside. You are encouraged to avoid outdoor activity around dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are more active.

Eliminating the potential for breeding grounds around your home and spraying insecticide where adult mosquitoes hide, will help reduce the mosquito menace around your property.

Some of those actions include:

Drain children’s wading pools when not in use;

Replace water in bird baths every three to four days;

Drill a hole in tire swings so water can drain out;
Check for clogged rain gutters and clean them out;
Clean vegetation and debris from the edges of ponds;
Dispose of cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots or similar water-holding containers;
Turn over wheelbarrows;
Aerate ornamental pools or stock them with fish;
Clean and chlorinate swimming pools not in use.
Mosquitoes may breed in any puddle that lasts for more than four days.