

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

The first case of West Nile virus in Nebraska this year has been reported in a woman in her forties who lives in the south central part of the state, according to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHS).

In addition, the first mosquitoes to test positive for West Nile have been found in Madison County in northeast Nebraska.

The virus is likely in other parts of the state, and people should take precautions, according to Dr. Joann Schaefer, Chief Medical Officer and Director of the Division of Public Health.

“People should take care to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes, no matter what part of the state they live in,” she added.

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

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) of McCook, which covers an eight-county area, including Chase, is again monitoring mosquitoes this summer.

It has six monitoring sites set up in Chase County, in both the Enders and Imperial areas. SWNPHD employees Julie Nabors and Heidi Wheeler are visiting the traps every two weeks.

So far, Myra Stoney of SWNPHD said Tuesday, no infected mosquitoes have been found in Chase or any of the other seven counties in the area.

Stoney noted that SWNPHD handed out informational packets to baseball players in the area in May that included magnets, DEET and other information. “Baseball and mosquitoes. I don’t like to think of them together,” she said. However, many games are played at dusk, when mosquitoes come out.

The DHHS encourages avoiding mosquito bites by:

Applying mosquito repellent containing DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus or IR3535;

Wearing a long-sleeved shirt, pants and socks;

Avoiding going out at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active;

Eliminating standing water to reduce mosquito breeding sites.

Most people who are infected by a mosquito have no symptoms or only mild flu-like symptoms. Less than one out of 150 people who get bitten by an infected mosquito and become infected will get seriously ill.

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

West Nile fever includes symptoms such as fever and muscle weakness. Symptoms of the more serious West Nile encephalitis include inflammation of the brain, disorientation, convulsions and paralysis.

Cases by year

In 2008 there were 47 confirmed cases of West Nile virus, with one death. Records began to be kept in 2002, with 174 cases reported and seven deaths.

Cases in other years include:

2007—163 confirmed and four deaths.

2006—264 confirmed and two deaths.

2005—188 confirmed and five deaths.

2004—53 confirmed and no deaths.

2003—1,994 confirmed and 27 deaths.

Public involvement

The public may help the state with tracking of the virus by monitoring dead birds, which may carry the virus.

To report a dead bird, contact SWNPHD at (308) 345-4223 or (888) 345-4223.