

For Immediate Release

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Media Alert

State's First 2004 Human West Nile Virus Case Confirmed

SANTA FE -- The state Department of Health announced today that an adult male from San Juan County has tested positive for West Nile Virus infection. The patient had only mild symptoms of the virus and has recovered.

“This means West Nile Virus season has started early this year,” said Secretary of Health Patricia Montoya. “The virus is one of the few diseases where people can take a few simple precautions, like using a repellent when outdoors, and be protected.”

“New Mexico’s first human case last year was in July,” said Paul Ettestad, the State Public Health Veterinarian for the New Mexico Department of Health. “It is important for people to begin taking precautions to avoid mosquito exposure. We have also notified local mosquito control programs of the case.”

The Department of Health continues to recommend that people take the following steps to reduce the risk of West Nile infection:

- Stay indoors at dawn, dusk, and in the early evening.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants and socks whenever you are outdoors.
- Use insect repellent products with no more than 35 percent DEET for adults and follow the directions on the label for children from ages 2-12. Products containing soybean oil and eucalyptus oil have also been shown to be effective but need to be applied more often.
- Keep windows and doors closed if not screened. If you leave your house doors or windows open, make sure they have screens that fit tightly and have no holes.

- Do not allow water to stagnate in old tires, flowerpots, trash containers, swimming pools, birdbaths, pet bowls, etc.
- Horse owners should contact their veterinarian to have their horses vaccinated against West Nile Virus.

In 2003, New Mexico had a total of 209 laboratory-confirmed cases and four fatal cases of West Nile Virus.

“ In people, West Nile Virus can cause flu-like symptoms such as fever, nausea, headache, and muscle aches,” said C. Mack Sewell, State Epidemiologist. “If someone feels they have the flu and are feeling sick, they should see their health care provider. The elderly are at most risk for serious disease from West Nile Virus.”

Both meningitis and encephalitis can be fatal, especially in the elderly. However, most people who become infected have either no symptoms or have only mild symptoms, and less than 1 percent of all people infected, including those who have no symptoms and have not been tested, develop meningitis or encephalitis. Meningitis is an infection of the lining around the brain, while encephalitis is an infection of the brain itself.

In addition, the National Animal Poison Control Center, which is part of the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine, states that under no circumstance should insect repellants be used on pets. Cats are highly sensitive to these chemicals plus both dogs and cats tend to lick themselves and can ingest toxins, which could harm them significantly more than the West Nile Virus. Furthermore, only products marked specifically for use on dogs and cats should be used on pets. So far both species have been fairly resistant to the virus.