West Nile virus confirmed in Benton County Mosquito Control District

Local News

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Olympipa, WA - The first sign of West Nile virus near the Benton-Yakima county line serves as a reminder for people living in and visiting eastern Washington to avoid mosquito bites. Mosquito samples collected by the Benton County Mosquito Control District near Byron Ponds/Grandview sewage lagoon in the small portion of Yakima County the district serves tested positive for the virus. That led the district to begin spraying today.

“Many local residents know the threat of West Nile virus is here, but we’re concerned that visitors from the west side may not be as aware,” said Benton-Franklin Health Officer Dr. Larry Jecha. “Eastern Washington in general, and the south central region in particular, have been the most active for the virus in recent years, and we expect big crowds for the Independence Day weekend. It’s vital that people take precautions to avoid mosquito bites.”

Environmental monitoring for West Nile virus, which includes testing mosquito samples and dead birds, is underway across the state. On the heels of our state’s busiest year for West Nile virus cases, state health officials agree it’s important that people protect themselves.

“Wear sleeves and long pants, and cover exposed skin with an effective repellent to avoid mosquito bites,” said Gregg Grunenfelder, of the state Department of Health. “This latest detection, coming just days after mosquitoes collected in Grant County tested positive, leaves no doubt that the West Nile virus season is here.”

A second West Nile virus positive mosquito sample from Grant County has also been reported this week. While there have been no human infections detected in Washington yet this year, there were 38 reported in 2009, including one death; all of the human exposures were in eastern Washington or out of state. Last year, West Nile virus was also detected in 22 dead birds, 346 mosquito samples, 72 horses, and a dog.

People can report dead birds (www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV) using the state health department’s dead bird reporting system or by contacting their local health agency (www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm).

For some people, West Nile virus infection can be very serious, and even fatal. Some people may develop meningitis or encephalitis; some neurological effects may be permanent. The majority of people bitten by a mosquito carrying the virus won’t become ill, yet some may have mild symptoms including headache and fever that go away without treatment. People over 50 and those with weak immune systems are at higher risk for serious illness.

Additional mosquito bite prevention tactics (www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/WNVQA.html) are available online.

Recorded audio quotes on West Nile virus prevention (http://www.doh.wa.gov/NewsRoom) are available on the Department of Health