

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

For more information, contact Tabi Prochazka, 487-3600 ext 107 or 1-866-701-7173

Continued rain makes for an increase in the mosquito populations

Panhandle Public Health District is in full swing for the 2011 West Nile Virus season through the collection of dead birds and mosquitoes. “Finding the virus in birds gives public health officials an indication of the level of virus in the area and the risk to human beings of contracting the disease,” said Tabi Prochazka, Environmental Health Coordinator for PPHD. The additional rain fall this year has increased the amount of pooled water leading to an increase in mosquito populations. Prochazka urges draining any standing water left in containers around your home and to add larvicides in standing water that cannot be drained.

Citizens may call PPHD at 308-487-3600 ext 107 or toll free at 866-701-7173 to report a dead bird. Testing will only be conducted on birds that have died within 24 hours, with no evidence of maggots or rotting. Testing on all species of birds will be conducted this year.

West Nile is transmitted through the bite of a mosquito that has picked up the virus by feeding on an infected bird. In turn, the mosquito can pass the virus to humans. Mosquito trapping for additional surveillance began in early June, Prochazka said, to determine if the virus is present in the area. Only one type of mosquito, the common Culex variety, carries the virus.

West Nile includes flu-like symptoms such as fever and muscle weakness. Symptoms of West Nile encephalitis include inflammation of the brain, disorientation, convulsions and paralysis. People over 50 and those with weak immune systems are especially vulnerable to the disease.

“Simple precautions are available to ‘fight the bite,’” Prochazka said.

- Using a repellent that contains DEET, picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus
- Wearing long-sleeved shirts, long pants, shoes and socks;
- Taking extra precautions when going outdoors at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active at dawn and dusk;
- Removing standing water where mosquitoes breed; and
- Keep window screens in good repair.

For additional information about West Nile Virus, visit www.pphd.org.

The purpose of the PPHD is to educate the region it serves about the prevention of epidemics, spread of contagious diseases, injury, illness and disability. The district is charged with promoting and encouraging healthy behaviors. They promote the quality and accessibility of health services and protection against environmental hazards. Through education, protection and promotion of these issues, PPHD believes the quality of life of the residents they serve can be greatly improved.