

NEWS RELEASE

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For immediate release

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WNV-positive mosquitoes discovered in Panhandle

Mosquito pools from Sheridan and Garden counties tested positive for West Nile Virus this past week. Human cases have been discovered in the Panhandle, as well indicating the virus is present in our area.

West Nile is transmitted through the bite of a mosquito that has picked up the virus by feeding on an infected bird,” said Tabi Prochazka, environmental coordinator with Panhandle Public Health District. In turn, the mosquito can pass the virus to humans. Routine mosquito trapping sites are located in four Panhandle counties. Prochazka also urges residents to report any dead birds to PPHD for WNV testing.

West Nile fever 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.

Only 1 in 150 people become seriously ill with WNV (encephalitis - inflammation of the brain, disorientation, convulsions and paralysis.) Twenty percent of those infected show moderate symptoms (fever, aches, nausea and vomiting) and 80 percent exhibit no symptoms at all. People over 50 and those with weak immune systems are especially vulnerable to the disease.

“We need to do the things that can prevent mosquito bites, like wearing insect repellent and long-sleeved shirts and pants at dawn and dusk, when mosquitoes are most active,” she said.

People can reduce their risk by:

- 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; and
- Removing standing water where mosquitoes breed.

“WNV-positive birds and mosquitoes are the first indicator for the presence of West Nile Virus in the area,” Tabi Prochazka, Environmental Health Coordinator at PPHD said. “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,” Prochazka said.

For additional information about physical activity and nutrition, visit www.pphd.org. The purpose of the Panhandle Public Health District 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, the Panhandle Public Health District believes the quality of life of the residents they serve can be greatly improved.