



NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: Jane Viste, Public Information Officer
Health and Environment
498-6750 (office)
412-2730 (cell)
jviste@larimer.org

DATE: June 26, 2007

SUBJECT: First West Nile Virus mosquitoes test positive in Larimer County

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Mosquitoes test positive for West Nile Virus in Larimer County

Mosquitoes trapped in Fort Collins and in Loveland tested positive for West Nile Virus today, according to officials at the Larimer County Department of Health and Environment. The mosquitoes were collected on June 19th and are the first to test positive in Colorado this year.

“These tests show that West Nile virus is circulating in Larimer County right now and mosquito numbers are on the rise,” said Dr. Adrienne LeBailly, director of the Larimer County Department of Health and Environment. “Unfortunately, in the week since the positive mosquitoes were trapped, the overall number of *Culex* mosquitoes has doubled. It’s time to wear repellent when outdoors, wherever and whenever mosquitoes are active,” she said.

West Nile virus is a disease transmitted to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito. It can lead to very serious illness and in some cases, to chronic disability and death. Complications of West Nile Virus increase with a person’s age, and people who had a solid organ transplant or who have weakened immune systems are at high risk for serious illness if infected with the virus.

LeBailly pointed out that the weather this week has been ideal for *Culex* mosquitoes, which are the main transmitters of West Nile virus. “The recent high temperatures can lead to explosive growth in their numbers,” she said.

Approximately eighty mosquito traps are placed each week across the county. The trapped mosquitoes are separated by species and then and tested for West Nile virus.

“It’s likely that there are more West Nile virus-positive mosquitoes circulating this week than last week,” LeBailly said. “The positive results are showing up earlier than in 2003—the worst year so far for West Nile virus infection in Larimer County.”

Dead birds, especially corvids (crows, ravens, magpies and jays) could also be a warning of increased West Nile activity. So far no dead birds have tested positive for West Nile virus in Larimer County this year.

LeBailly said that there have been no confirmed reports of West Nile virus in humans in Colorado yet, but that could change very quickly.

With the confirmation that West Nile virus is circulating in mosquitoes, the health department stresses that now is the time to stock up on repellent and begin using it regularly when going outside at peak mosquito times, between dusk and dawn.

“It’s always a good practice to apply an effective repellent before gathering for barbecues, firework shows, camping and other outdoor activities,” said LeBailly. The peak season for infection with West Nile Virus is from July through August.

Preventive actions include using an effective mosquito repellent when outside during peak mosquito hours, dressing to limit exposed skin, and eliminating mosquito breeding areas around your home such as containers of standing water.

To help minimize contact with mosquitoes as you enjoy your holiday and summer outdoor activities, the Department of Health and Environment also recommends the following:

- Wear an insect repellent containing DEET, following instructions carefully, whenever you are outside, even when just relaxing in the backyard. Be sure to apply repellent on children and elderly, following instructions on the label or container.
- Avoid outdoor activities at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active.
- Wear long pants and long sleeves to protect against mosquito bites
- Empty standing water in bird baths, pools, etc., at least weekly—twice a week when temperatures are over 90 degrees and mosquitoes can grow from eggs to biting adults in only 5 days. Receptacles such as buckets, clogged rain gutters, and barrels are very attractive spots for a mosquito to lay its eggs.
- Stay clear of places where mosquitoes are often found (tall grasses, wetlands, shrubs and grassy shores).

- Repair all house screens and screen doors now. A blood-seeking mosquito needs only a fraction of an inch gap to enter your home.
- Trim your bushes up to approximately 2 feet from the ground so you can “see the knees of the trees.” This allows air flow and reduces dampness, thus making your bushes a poor hiding place for mosquitoes.
- Plant low-water-use lawns and gardens now while mosquito populations are low.
- If you find a dead crow, blue jay, magpie, or raven that does not seem to be injured, leave it where it is and call 1-877-462-2911

“It’s hard to predict how serious of a West Nile season we will have,” LeBailly said, “but having positive mosquitoes this early could indicate a longer and more infectious season. The measure of severity will become apparent as the summer unfolds.

“What’s most important at this point is protecting yourself and your family from begin infected.”

For more information on West Nile Virus, call the Larimer County Department of Health and Environment at 498-6700. To report dead birds that do not seem injured, call 1-877-462-2911.

For information on repellent use, go to

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/RepellentUpdates.htm>

Other sources of information on West Nile virus are:

<http://www.fightthebitecolorado.com/>

<http://www.cdph.state.co.us/dc/zoonosis/wnv/index.html>

-- end --