



**For Immediate Release**

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**Don't give mosquitoes a biting chance**

“The pesky mosquito, out in force already, can be a carrier of West Nile virus, a potentially serious illness,” said Michele Bever, executive director for South Heartland District Health Department (SHDHD).

“Mosquitoes become infected by biting (feeding on) an infected bird,” Bever said. “An infected mosquito can then spread the virus to animals it bites, such as other birds and horses, as well as humans. The usual culprits are mosquitoes of the *Culex* species,” she said.

“At South Heartland, we are monitoring the mosquitoes to watch for West Nile virus,” said Jim Morgan, public health risk coordinator.

“South Heartland participates in a state-wide mosquito surveillance program, trapping mosquitoes in Adams and Webster counties during the months of June through early September,” Morgan said. “Mosquitoes trapped are counted and analyzed for West Nile and other viruses by Nebraska DHHS,” he said.

Morgan said that residents can help their community monitor West Nile virus by reporting dead birds to the local health department.

“Dead birds may be a sign that West Nile virus is circulating between the birds and the mosquitoes in a particular area,” Morgan said. “The South Heartland District Health Department, which covers Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties, will accept freshly dead, adult birds if they are in the Corvidae family, which includes jays, magpies, crows and ravens,” he said.

Dead birds are sent to the state lab for testing. To be tested, the bird must be collected and frozen for shipment within 24 hours of death. To report a dead bird for testing, contact SHDHD at 402-462-6211 or toll free at 1-877-238-7595.

Dr. Bever said that summer is a good time to assess your home environment. “Empty standing water from anything that might serve as a container such as flower pots, gutters, tires, buckets, etc.,” she said. “Drill a drainage hole in tire swings and at least weekly empty and replace the water in outdoor pet bowls, children’s wading pools, or bird baths. Try to eliminate any standing water where mosquitoes may breed,” she said.

According to Jessica Warner, disease investigator for SHDHD, approximately 20% of people infected with West Nile virus experience mild symptoms consisting of fever, headache, body aches, nausea, vomiting, and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash on the chest, stomach, and back. She said these symptoms can last from just a few days to several weeks.

Warner also explained that most people (4 out of 5) who are infected with West Nile virus do not show any symptoms at all, but there is no way to know ahead of time whether you will be one of these lucky ones.

Warner said that most people with mild symptoms recover on their own but for others the symptoms may last for weeks or months. More severe cases of West Nile illness may require hospitalization to receive supportive treatment.

“Last year, there were 288 cases of West Nile illness, including cases detected through blood donation,” said Warner. “There were 11 deaths in Nebraska due to West Nile virus,” she said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests several ways to prevent mosquito bites. When you are outdoors, be sure to wear mosquito repellent containing DEET, or other insect repellent that is registered with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and follow the directions on the package for proper use. Between dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are most active, wear long sleeves and pants or consider staying indoors. In addition, keep mosquitoes out of your house by installing screens or ensuring that the screens on your windows and doors are in good shape.

Bever recommends the four ‘D’s of effective prevention: Dusk to Dawn (avoid outdoor activity or take extra care to protect yourself), Dress Appropriately (long sleeves, pants, socks when outside during the peak hours and locations of mosquito activity), DEET (in your mosquito repellent), Drain (any standing water). “Remind your family members and friends of these easy steps to “Fight the Bite”, she said.

For more information call South Heartland District Health Department at 402-462-6211 or toll free at 1-877-238-7595 or visit the SHDHD website: [www.southheartlandhealth.org](http://www.southheartlandhealth.org)

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