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Albertans reminded to protect themselves from West Nile virus infection

SLAVE LAKE – Alberta Health Services (AHS) is reminding Albertans to take precautions necessary to protect themselves against West Nile virus infection.

“With exposure to mosquitoes comes risk of West Nile virus,” says Dr. Kathryn Koliaska, Medical Officer of Health – North Zone. “Because some mosquitoes carry West Nile virus, it’s important to avoid being bitten at all.”

Whenever engaging in outdoor activities, or even just relaxing outside, all Albertans should take these simple steps to prevent bites and protect themselves from West Nile virus:

- Wear a long-sleeved, light-coloured shirt, pants, and a hat.
- Use insect repellent with DEET.
- Consider staying indoors at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active.

“These steps can make it harder for mosquitoes to find you, and remember: if mosquitoes can’t find you, they can’t bite you,” says Dr. Koliaska.

After being bitten by a mosquito carrying West Nile virus, humans can develop West Nile Non-Neurological Syndrome (formerly known as West Nile fever) or the more serious West Nile Neurological Syndrome.

Symptoms of Non-Neurological Syndrome can be uncomfortable, including fever, chills, nausea, vomiting, fatigue, skin rash, swollen glands and headache. For those individuals who do develop Neurological Syndrome, symptoms can be much more severe, including tremors, drowsiness, confusion, swallowing problems, high fever, unconsciousness, paralysis and even death.

From 2003 to 2015, 680 cases of West Nile virus were confirmed in Alberta, many of which were acquired here in the province.

Albertans can learn more about West Nile virus and the precautions necessary to reduce risk at www.fightthebite.info or by calling Health Link at 811.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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