



June 19, 2009

Reminder for outdoor enthusiasts to prepare for WNV season ***Albertans are encouraged to fight the mosquito bite throughout summer***

Edmonton... Alberta Health and Wellness, together with Alberta Health Services, are advising Albertans, particularly seniors, that they can reduce their risk of acquiring West Nile virus (WNV) every summer by using simple preventive measures.

Preventive measures should include wearing protective clothing like pants and socks, applying a repellent with DEET, reducing time spent outdoors at dawn and dusk, and reducing the mosquito habitat in the yard at home. These safeguards can prevent bites from the *Culex tarsalis* mosquitoes, the breed known to carry WNV in Alberta.

Symptoms of WNV infection are often flu-like and include headache, fever, chills, fatigue, swollen glands and a skin rash. The more severe West Nile Neurological Syndrome is manifested by neck stiffness, disorientation, tremors or convulsions, difficulty moving, muscle weakness and paralysis or coma. WNV symptoms usually appear within three to 14 days. Anyone developing these symptoms should consult a physician immediately.

To date, there is no evidence that being bitten by mosquitoes increases a person's immunity to WNV and it continues to remain uncertain as to whether or not humans develop long-lasting immunity after being bitten by an infected mosquito.

Each year, the risk of contracting WNV typically increases throughout July and August, which can be attributed to both moisture and hotter temperatures. However, unpredictable summer weather conditions can also mean the number of *Culex tarsalis* mosquitoes in Alberta may be lower or higher when compared to previous years. The risk of WNV is highest in the southern part of the province.

Last year, Alberta had one reported human case of WNV, while in 2007 there was a total of 320 human WNV cases. Alberta surveillance for human cases is ongoing in collaboration with the Public Health Agency of Canada. Mosquitoes and birds are no longer monitored in Alberta as this monitoring has proven to be ineffective.

For more information on WNV, visit www.fightthebite.info, or call HEALTHLink Alberta at 1-866-408-LINK (5465).

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