

Department of Health reports first New Mexico West Nile case

Written by Staff Reports
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The first human case of West Nile virus infection in New Mexico in 2019 has been confirmed in a 42-year-old woman from Doña Ana County. The woman required hospitalization and is recovering from the disease, according to a N.M. Dept. of Health press release, issued Aug. 12.

West Nile virus is a disease transmitted by mosquitoes that can sometimes be fatal. In New Mexico, there have been cases of West Nile virus every year since the virus migrated to New Mexico in 2003.

Mosquito populations tend to rise all over the state of New Mexico following the increased precipitation originating from the monsoon rains. Female mosquitoes lay their eggs in standing water, where hundreds of mosquitoes can emerge at once. Mosquitoes can carry diseases, including West Nile virus, that can make you and your family sick. It only takes one bite from an infected mosquito for a person to get sick.

The New Mexico Department of Health urges New Mexicans to take precautions to protect themselves against West Nile virus. Last year there were seven confirmed cases in New Mexico, including one fatal case, and in 2017, there were 33 confirmed West Nile virus cases in New Mexico, with one reported death.

To continue reducing the chances of a mosquito bite that can transmit West Nile virus, NMDOH recommends that people should:

Use an approved insect repellent every time they go outside and follow the instructions on the label. Among the EPA-approved repellents are those that contain DEET, picaridin, IR3535 and oil of lemon eucalyptus/para-menthane-diol.

Regularly drain standing water, including water collecting in empty cans, tires, buckets, clogged rain gutters, saucers under potted plants, birdbaths, wading pools, and pet's water bowls. Mosquitoes that spread West Nile virus breed in stagnant water.

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Make sure rain barrels are tightly screened.

Wear long sleeves and pants at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active.

Use air conditioning or make sure there are screens on all doors and windows to keep mosquitoes from entering the home.

“West Nile virus can be a health concern anywhere in New Mexico until after the first hard frost in your area of the state,” said Department of Health Secretary Kathy Kunkel. “Until colder weather takes hold, take precautions against mosquito bites wherever mosquitoes are active.”

There are no medications to treat or vaccines to prevent West Nile virus infection. People 50 years of age and older and those with other health issues are at a higher risk of becoming seriously ill or dying when they become infected with the virus. If people have symptoms and suspect West Nile virus infection, they should contact their healthcare provider.

Symptoms of the milder form of illness, West Nile fever, can include headache, fever, muscle and joint aches, nausea and fatigue. People with West Nile fever typically recover on their own, although symptoms may last for weeks to months.

Symptoms of West Nile neuroinvasive disease can include those of West Nile fever plus neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness and paralysis.

Horses can get sick with West Nile virus too. To protect your horse against West Nile virus:

Consult your veterinarian to ensure the current West Nile virus vaccination status of your horse.

Routinely apply horse-specific insect repellent on your horses.

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Minimize horse exposure to mosquitoes during peak mosquito feeding periods at dawn and dusk.

For more information, including fact sheets in English and Spanish, about how to protect against West Nile virus, visit <https://nmhealth.org/about/erd/ideb/zdp/wnv/>.