

## *Fight the Bite:*

### Protect Yourself and Your Family from West Nile Virus

West Nile virus, which humans get after being bitten by mosquitoes infected with the virus, has been active in Louisiana since 2002, an outbreak year when the state experienced 328 cases and 24 deaths from the disease.

For the past 10 years, state health officials have conducted robust surveillance during mosquito season, which includes working with doctors, hospitals and health care providers around the state to track human cases and remind people to be vigilant in protecting themselves from getting West Nile by avoiding mosquito bites.

If a person gets West Nile virus, there are three forms it can take:

- ▶ **Asymptomatic West Nile**, in which the person doesn't experience any symptoms and only discovers he/she has West Nile through blood work done for an unrelated reason, such as blood donation or medical lab screening. Most people who get West Nile will have this form of the virus.
- ▶ **West Nile Fever**, a milder form of sickness in which the person experiences a flu-like illness that causes symptoms such as fever, headache, body aches, nausea, and, less frequently, skin rash on chest, stomach and back, or sometimes swollen lymph glands or eye pain. About 20 percent of people infected with West Nile have this form of the virus.
- ▶ **West Nile Neuroinvasive Disease**, the most severe form of the virus that infects the brain and spinal cord, and can result in death, paralysis or brain damage. Fewer than one percent of all people who get West Nile will develop this form of the disease, but of those who do get West Nile neuroinvasive disease, 10 percent die and another 10 percent will have permanent nervous system damage. The elderly are most at risk for this form of West Nile, but anyone who contracts the virus has the potential to develop neuroinvasive disease.

A decade of surveillance has shown that West Nile is active and present in all parts of the state. Local mosquito control partners and abatement districts conduct aerial spraying and other tactics to control the mosquito population, but Louisiana residents of every age, in every parish, have a personal responsibility to own their health and prevent West Nile infection by avoiding mosquito bites.

## *Protect Yourself*

- ▶ If you will be outside, you should wear a mosquito repellent containing DEET. The American Academy of Pediatrics

(AAP) recommends that repellents should contain no more than 30 percent DEET when used on children. Insect repellents also are not recommended for children younger than two months.

- ▶ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that people always follow the directions on the product label when applying repellent.
- ▶ People should be especially vigilant about mosquito bites if they are outside at dusk. The mosquitoes that carry West Nile are most active at that time.
- ▶ Apply repellent on exposed skin and clothing. Do not apply under your clothes or on broken skin.
- ▶ To apply repellent to your face, spray on your hands and then rub on your face.
- ▶ Adults should always apply repellent to children.
- ▶ Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants when outdoors for long periods of time.
- ▶ Avoid perfumes and colognes when outdoors for extended periods of time.

Another important tactic to protect yourself from West Nile is to control the mosquito population in and around your home:

- ▶ Make sure that your house has tight-fitting windows and doors. Install or repair window screens, to prevent mosquitoes from coming into your house.
- ▶ Mosquitoes breed in standing water, so eliminate any that collects on your property. Dispose of tin cans, ceramic pots and other unnecessary containers that have accumulated around your home. Turn over wheelbarrows, plastic wading pools or buckets that could collect water.
- ▶ Drill holes in the bottom of outdoor recycling containers. Drainage holes that are located on the container sides collect enough water for mosquitoes to breed.
- ▶ Aerate ornamental pools or stock them with fish. Water gardens can become major mosquito producers if they are allowed to stagnate.
- ▶ Clean and chlorinate swimming pools that are not being used. An unattended swimming pool can produce enough mosquitoes to result in neighborhood-wide complaints.
- ▶ Be aware that mosquitoes can breed in the water that collects on swimming pool covers, so be sure to empty and dry these regularly, too.