PRESS RELEASE

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FROM: Barb Ogg, PhD, Extension Educator, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension in Lancaster County

Protect Yourself from West Nile Virus by Controlling Mosquitoes

The recent rains are a relief, but because standing water breeds mosquitos, people should take precautions now to protect themselves against the West Nile Virus disease. West Nile Virus affects birds, horses and people but is only transmitted by mosquitos. It is not spread by person-to-person contact.

A bite from an infected mosquito will not always make you sick; most people infected with West Nile Virus either have no symptoms or experience mild illness. Exposure to a mosquito carrying the West Nile Virus makes anyone susceptible, but people at greatest risk are those more than 50 years old, and people who are immuno-compromised. There currently is no vaccine for West Nile Virus for humans, although one exists for horses.

Because West Nile Virus is transmitted by mosquitoes, Lancaster County Extension Educator Barb Ogg says, “The key to protecting yourself from West Nile Virus is to control mosquitos and to avoid being bitten by them. The best way to control mosquitoes is to eliminate sites where mosquitos breed.” Tips include:

- Eliminate standing water on your property because mosquitos will breed in any puddle existing for more than four days.
- Properly discard used tires and children’s toys that catch water and serve as a breeding ground. Turn over plastic wading pools and wheel barrows when not in use.
- Empty bird baths and refill at least weekly to interrupt the mosquito breeding cycle.
- Dispose of empty tin cans, paint containers, flower pots and other similar containers that have accumulated on your property.
- Clogged roof gutters can be a breeding site for mosquitos; they should be checked periodically for proper drainage.
- Aerate ornamental pools or stock them with fish.
- Control mosquito larvae in standing ponds with mosquito “dunks” containing Bt, which specifically kills mosquito larvae but is safe for birds and wildlife. These products can be purchased at local home
Trim shrubs and mow tall grass close to your home because they provide excellent resting sites for adult mosquitoes.

Ogg adds, “The second way to protect yourself is to try to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes. Avoid mosquito-infested areas or stay indoors when mosquitoes are most active. Most mosquitoes are active two to three hours before and after dark, though one mosquito, the Asian tiger mosquito, is active during the day.” Other tips include:

Wear light-colored clothing, long-sleeved shirts and slacks when working outdoors, especially during months when mosquitos are active or when working in infested areas.

Use a personal repellent containing DEET. Studies have shown DEET repellents are more effective than other products currently available. Read and follow label directions when using DEET. Use repellents sparingly, and use the lowest concentration, especially on children. It is generally recommended persons should use products that contain 30 percent or less DEET. For children, it is best to be conservative and keep the concentration of DEET at 10 percent or less. In many situations, it may make sense to spray clothing, but be aware that DEET can damage plastics, leather, and synthetic fabrics like rayon.

Avoid or use colognes and perfumes sparingly. These together with other gases such as carbon dioxide emitted during physical exertion, attract mosquitos.

Use mosquito netting when sleeping outdoors.

This information is valid for southeastern Nebraska. It may or may not apply in your area. Contact your local Cooperative Extension office for more information and resources.