



*“To protect and improve
the health and environment
of the people of Colorado.”*

NEWS

Colorado Department
of Public Health
and Environment

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First Human West Nile Virus Cases Confirmed in Colorado for 2004

DENVER—The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment joined Tri-County Health Department and the Pueblo City-County Health Department Friday in confirming Colorado’s first two reported human cases of West Nile virus for 2004.

The first human case involved a 35-year-old woman from Adams County, who became ill with West Nile fever on May 30. She was not hospitalized and is recovering. The second human case involved a 30-year-old man from Pueblo County, who became ill with West Nile fever on June 2. He was not hospitalized and is recovering.

This year’s first illness comes a month earlier than last year’s first reported human case, who became ill on July 6. Last year’s first case reported on July 22, involved a 28-year-old man from Weld County. He was diagnosed with West Nile fever, was not hospitalized and recovered. Although not tested until late August and reported until September 9, Colorado’s earliest West Nile virus illness onset in 2003 was actually June 11 and involved a 55-year-old woman from Pueblo County.

Douglas H. Benevento, the executive director of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, said, “These new cases do not come as a surprise. We have been preparing for the reemergence of West Nile virus and want to strongly remind Coloradans that this is a preventable illness. Now is the time to take personal precautions against being bitten by the mosquitoes that carry this disease. Coloradans should make it a habit to use repellent containing DEET to protect themselves and their children.”

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Dr. Richard L. Vogt, the executive director of Tri-County Health Department, agreed, saying, "For many people, West Nile virus infection is not just a mild illness, and it can affect anyone of any age. People should take protective measures now to prevent infection from mosquito bites--by wearing proper clothing; using insect repellent containing DEET; and by eliminating any standing water around their property which could become mosquito breeding areas."

Other recommended mosquito precautions include:

- Avoiding outdoor activities at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active.
- Wearing long-sleeved shirts, long pants, shoes and socks.
- Using mosquito repellents than contain DEET at anytime when outdoors.
- Eliminating standing water in tires and containers around the house, as these can easily become mosquito-breeding sites.

Dr. Christine Nevin-Woods, director of the Pueblo City-County Health Department, said, "While not unexpected, it is unfortunate that the virus is now documented to be in our community so early in the season. As the summer progresses and mosquito populations increase, so will the risk of humans being infected by West Nile virus.

"Individuals can protect themselves from West Nile virus by employing the four D's, which include draining standing water around the house weekly in order to eliminate mosquito breeding areas; limiting outdoor activities between dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are most active; using repellent containing DEET; and dressing in long sleeves and pants when going outside."

Dr. Ned Calonge, the state's chief medical officer who is based at the Department of Public Health and Environment, said, "Earlier onset of West Nile virus this year is not unexpected given the recent hot weather. Earlier onset also does not necessarily signal a worse season. However, the cases should strengthen our message that it's time to begin taking precautions to avoid mosquito bites and prevent West Nile virus infection."

West Nile virus is carried long distances by infected birds and then spread locally by mosquitoes that bite these birds. Infected mosquitoes can then bite and pass the virus to humans and animals, primarily birds and horses.

Dead birds that test positive for the virus are usually an early warning sign of West Nile virus activity in an area. However, there have been no confirmed positive bird results anywhere in Colorado so far this year, and very few reports of dead birds.

However, three Colorado horses recently have been confirmed as having West Nile virus. A horse from Arapahoe County and a horse from Kit Carson are recovering. A Montrose County horse had to be euthanized.

Colorado's neighboring states of New Mexico and Wyoming each have confirmed one human case of West Nile virus in the past several weeks and Arizona has confirmed seven cases. California also announced Tuesday that the first human case of West Nile virus has been confirmed there in the San Bernadino area.

All residents of areas where West Nile virus activity has been confirmed are at risk, but people over age 50 seem to be especially vulnerable to the most severe forms of disease. Most illnesses due to West Nile virus involve fever, headache, body aches, skin rash and occasionally swollen lymph nodes.

West Nile virus also can cause paralysis, encephalitis, or inflammation of the brain, and/or meningitis, or inflammation of the brain's lining. In rare cases, it can be fatal.

More severe symptoms may include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, muscle weakness or convulsions. Persons with these symptoms should seek medical attention immediately.

West Nile virus has been moving across the United States from east to west since first striking New York City in the summer of 1999. The virus was first identified in Colorado in August 2002. In 2003, there were 2,947 confirmed human cases in Colorado, with 63 deaths.

Extensive information on West Nile virus in Colorado and numerous practical tips can be found at the Web site www.FightTheBiteColorado.com or by calling the Colorado HelpLine at 1-877-462-2911.