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For immediate release

West Nile and La Crosse Encephalitis season is upon us

The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, Bureau for Public Health, is gearing up for another season of mosquitos and the potential return of the West Nile virus as well as La Crosse Encephalitis.

West Nile virus and La Crosse Encephalitis cases occur primarily in the summer and fall, so the time to take action is now.

"You can reduce the number of mosquitoes around your home and neighborhood by emptying standing or stagnant water from cans, bottles, old tires, wading pools, flower pots, and other containers," said Loretta Haddy, state epidemiologist. "You can also clean out clogged gutters and drill holes in the bottom of recycling containers to eliminate mosquito breeding habitats. In addition, making sure that all windows have proper screens will help keep mosquitoes out of your home."

The most important factor to the mosquito season is that mosquito populations can be reduced or eliminated by removing all potential for standing water – bird baths, pet bowls, tires, pots, cans or even bottle caps. There is no container too small when it comes to potential breeding grounds for mosquitos that carry the West Nile virus.

West Nile virus and La Crosse Encephalitis may be spread to people by the bite of an infected mosquito. It cannot be spread from casual human to human contact. When outdoors during mosquito season, people can protect themselves by being properly clothed in long, loose and light colored clothing and by using mosquito repellants containing DEET.

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When using products that contain DEET, use according to the manufacturer's recommendations. Never apply products containing DEET to faces and hands of children. Symptoms from the virus include fever, headache, body aches, fatigue, confusion, weakness, nausea, vomiting and stiff neck.

Last year, West Virginia saw its first human and animal cases Of West Nile virus and dead bird testing is set to begin in May. This year we will continue to monitor West Nile activity with dead bird and mosquito surveillance. Persons who see a dead bird should contact their local health department. Birds are tested for West Nile at the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study at the University of Georgia, College of Veterinary Medicine.

For more information contact your local health department or the Division of Surveillance and Disease Control at 1-304-558-5358 or www.wvdhhr.org.

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