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LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR
JUDYANN BIGBY, M.D.
SECRETARY

JOHN AUERBACH
COMMISSIONER

Contact:

John Jacob
John.Jacob@state.ma.us
617-624-5282

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State Health Officials Find More Mosquitoes Infected with West Nile Virus and EEE

Increased risk of EEE in both northeastern and southeastern Massachusetts

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BOSTON — The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) today announced additional findings of West Nile Virus (WNV) and eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) in multiple mosquito samples from various parts of the state. In the past week, WNV has been found in mosquito samples from Quincy, Bourne and Worcester, and EEE has been found in mosquito samples from Lakeville, New Bedford and Merrimac.

The infected mosquitoes found in Merrimac are of particular concern to state health officials. There have now been a total of three mosquito samples from the town that have tested positive for EEE. One of these samples was in a species of mosquito that is more likely to bite humans than birds, increasing the potential transmission of EEE to humans. The area of elevated risk includes the towns of Merrimac, Haverhill and Amesbury.

“We’ve had widespread findings of West Nile Virus, indicating a fairly large area of some risk – however, the EEE activity is somewhat more concerning,” said DPH State Epidemiologist Dr. Al DeMaria. “The risk for human cases of EEE in parts of southeastern Massachusetts increased last week, and with today’s findings, the northeast corner is now showing increased risk for EEE as well.”

There have only been 10 human cases of WNV in Massachusetts during the last five years. While WNV can infect people of all ages, people over the age of 50 are at higher risk for severe disease. There was one human case of EEE during 2008; however there were 13 cases leading to six deaths from 2004 through 2006. EEE is a serious disease for people of all ages and can cause death. Both WNV and EEE are spread to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito.

Positive mosquito results from 2009 can be found on the Arbovirus Surveillance Information web page at westnile.ashtonweb.com.

People have an important role to play in protecting themselves and their loved ones from illnesses caused by mosquitoes.

Avoid Mosquito Bites

- Be Aware of Peak Mosquito Hours.** The hours from dusk to dawn are peak biting times for many mosquitoes. Consider rescheduling outdoor activities that occur during evening or early morning.
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- Clothing Can Help Reduce Mosquito Bites.** Wearing long-sleeves, long pants and socks when outdoors will help keep mosquitoes away from your skin.
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- Apply Insect Repellent when outdoors.** Use a repellent with DEET (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide), permethrin, picaridin (KBR 3023), oil of lemon eucalyptus [p-methane 3, 8-diol (PMD)] or IR3535 according to the instructions on the product label. DEET products should not be used on infants under two months of age and should be used in concentrations of 30% or less on older children. Oil of lemon eucalyptus should not be used on children under three years of age.
- should not be used on children under three years of age.

Mosquito-Proof Your Home

- Drain Standing Water.** Mosquitoes lay their eggs in standing water. Limit the number of places around your home for mosquitoes to breed by either draining or discarding items that hold water. Check rain gutters and drains. Empty any unused flowerpots and wading pools, and change water in birdbaths frequently.
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- Install or Repair Screens.** Keep mosquitoes outside by having tightly-fitting screens on all of your windows and doors.
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More information is available at: www.mass.gov/dph/wnv. Information about WNV and EEE is also available by calling the DPH recorded information line at 1-866-MASS-WNV (1-866-627-7968), or the DPH Epidemiology Program at 617-983-6800.

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