



News Release - Massachusetts Department of Public Health

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State public health officials raise risk level for EEE to high in several southeastern communities

Residents urged to protect themselves from mosquitoes

BOSTON (July 31, 2019) - The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) today announced that seven communities in southeastern Massachusetts are at high risk from the eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) virus. Those communities are Carver, Easton, Freetown, Lakeville, Middleboro, New Bedford and Raynham in Bristol and Plymouth counties. EEE virus has been found in 92 mosquito samples this year and one-third of them are from species of mosquitoes capable of spreading the virus to people.

No human or animal cases of EEE have been detected so far this year.

"The mosquito surveillance results indicate that the virus has become widespread in an area of Massachusetts that historically sees the most EEE activity," said Public Health Commissioner Monica Bharel, MD, MPH. "We're raising the risk level because there is more activity than we typically see and it is happening early in the season."

DPH is working with the local communities, local Mosquito Control Projects and other mosquito control experts to coordinate surveillance and discuss appropriate public health response activities.

EEE is a rare but serious and potentially fatal disease that can affect people of all ages. EEE occurs sporadically in Massachusetts with the most recent outbreak years occurring from 2004-2006, and 2010-2012. There were 22 human cases of EEE infection during those two outbreak periods with 14 cases occurring among residents of Bristol and Plymouth Counties. The last human case of EEE in Massachusetts occurred in 2013.

In addition to the risk level being raised to high in the seven communities, the risk level was elevated to moderate in 12 communities. Those communities are Berkley, Dighton, East Bridgewater, Hanson, Kingston, Mattapoisett, Norton, Pembroke, Rehoboth, Rochester, Taunton, and West Bridgewater. Already at moderate risk are Acushnet, Bridgewater, Dartmouth, Fairhaven, Halifax, and Plympton.

“We take EEE very seriously and this year we are concerned about the risk,” said DPH State Epidemiologist Dr. Catherine Brown. “It is important for residents to know that in communities at high risk for EEE, we strongly encourage rescheduling evening outdoor events to avoid the hours between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active.”

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

Avoid Mosquito Bites

Apply Insect Repellent when Outdoors. Use a repellent with an EPA-registered ingredient (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.

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 in areas of high risk.

Clothing Can Help Reduce Mosquito Bites. Wearing long-sleeves, long pants and socks when outdoors will help keep mosquitoes away from your skin.

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 the water in birdbaths frequently.

Install or Repair Screens. Keep mosquitoes outside by having tightly-fitting screens on all of your windows and doors.

Protect Your Animals

Animal owners should reduce potential mosquito breeding sites on their property by eliminating standing water from containers such as buckets, tires, and wading pools – especially after heavy rains. Water troughs provide excellent mosquito breeding habitats and should be flushed out at least once a week during the summer months to reduce mosquitoes near paddock areas. Horse owners should keep horses in indoor stalls at night to reduce their risk of exposure to mosquitoes. Owners should also speak with their veterinarian about mosquito repellents approved for use in animals and vaccinations to prevent WNV and EEE. If an animal is suspected of having WNV or EEE, owners are required to report to DAR, Division of Animal Health by calling 617-626-1795 and to the Department of Public Health (DPH) by calling 617-983-6800.

More information, including all West Nile virus and EEE positive results, can be found on the Arbovirus Surveillance Information [web page](#) or by calling the DPH Epidemiology Program at 617-983-6800.