



Maricopa County

News Release

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As West Nile Cases Climb, A Back to School Reminder: Protect Yourself Against Mosquito Bites

Stay quiet while the teacher is speaking. Keep your hands and feet to yourself. Wear your mosquito repellent? It might not be a new school rule; however, it may be a good lesson for all to learn. As Valley schools open their doors this month, health officials are worried about more than germs lurking in the classroom – they're worried about the mosquitoes that come out in the early morning and evening, just as children are on their way to and from school.

The 2007 West Nile Virus (WNV) season has been especially active, and the Maricopa County Departments of Environmental Services and Public Health would like to remind residents to take precautions to protect themselves and their loved ones from the potentially dangerous West Nile virus.

"This is a bad year for West Nile, both nationally and locally," said Dr. Bob England, director of the Maricopa County Department of Public Health, "and at the rate we're going, this may be our community's second worst season yet. We've already had 20 confirmed human cases of the disease."

WNV is transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. Approximately 20 percent of people infected with the virus will feel flu-like symptoms occurring three to 15 days after the mosquito bite.

Symptoms may include fever, headache, body aches, nausea, vomiting, swollen lymph glands, and skin rash on the chest, stomach and back. A small percentage of people who are infected with WNV will experience severe symptoms, such as meningitis, encephalitis, paralysis, and even death. People over the age of 50 are generally at a higher risk for severe symptoms. If a person thinks he or she has WNV symptoms, he or she should consult their health care provider.

Health officials say Valley residents should be aware that although the majority of people who become infected with the virus will show no symptoms at all, for a small percentage of people it can be serious or even fatal.

Mosquitoes are most active in the morning and evening, when many students are outdoors traveling to and from school. Maricopa County reminds parents to take steps to protect their children from WNV.

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“Parents need to teach their kids that mosquitoes are more than pests; they can make us sick and it’s important to protect ourselves from mosquito bites,” said Fulton Brock, chairman of the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors. “Before you let your kids out the door in the morning for their walk to school or the bus stop, protect them by making them wear insect repellent, and once the weather cools off a bit, long sleeves and pants will offer even further protection.”

The Maricopa County Department of Public Health has already confirmed about three times more cases of the virus than they had at this time last year. With recent monsoon rains and more on the way, the worst may be yet to come.

“Our Valley’s extreme heat, combined with the recent storms, creates the ideal breeding conditions for mosquitoes,” said John Power, director of the Maricopa County Environmental Services Department. “Our only hope of controlling WNV in our community is for residents to take action to prevent backyard breeding and report to our department any mosquito problems, green pools, or standing water.”

Backyard breeding can occur anywhere – in as small a location as water in flower pots or pet bowls, to bigger spots such as green pools and backyard irrigation. It is important that residents survey their yards, especially after rainstorms, to make sure all standing water is dumped out.

Some species of mosquitoes that transmit West Nile virus don’t tend to travel very far, so if neighbors work together to rid their yards of standing water, this will decrease the likelihood of mosquitoes and mosquito-borne diseases in their neighborhoods.

For more information on West Nile virus, WNV materials or presentations for your group/organization, public health assistance, WNV dead bird drop-off locations, or to report green pools or file any mosquito related complaint, call (602) 506-0700 or visit www.WestNileAZ.org or www.maricopa.gov/wnv.

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