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DCHHS announces the beginning of West Nile season

Dallas County Health and Human Services officials held a press conference today to announce the beginning of the West Nile Virus season.

Mosquito season in Dallas County typically runs from May to October, with peak WNV activity in August. Residents should be on heightened alert during these months.

During today’s press conference, members of the department gave an overview of the department’s program, which consists of a combination of prevention, surveillance and control. The department’s integrated mosquito management program focuses on reducing the risk of illness.

West Nile Virus is a disease that is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. Infected mosquitoes can transmit the virus to humans and animals.

DCHHS Director Zachary Thompson encouraged citizens to help DCHHS “fight the bites” by taking a proactive role and using the three Ds to defend against West Nile: Deet, Drain and Dress.

From the surveillance data gathered over the years, DCHHS epidemiologists have found that there is a high degree of variability in terms of the spread of the virus.

Last year was considered a relatively inactive year. There were no human cases of WNV or deaths reported in Dallas County. Only one positive mosquito pool – found in Cockrell Hill – was detected in early September.

Though people 50 years and older are more susceptible to severe illness, everyone is at risk.

West Nile survivor and Dallas County resident Sean Lemoine, who shared his devastating experience with the disease, had a simple message for the public: “protect yourself and your kids.”
Lemoine, who was infected in August 2009, is back to work and continuing to recover.

He spent 184 days in the hospital and several more in rehabilitation. He said he lost two years of his life to the illness.

“If that means anything to you, do what these people are telling you to do and protect your family,” Lemoine said.

Though no mosquito pools have tested positive for West Nile this season, Thompson encouraged residents to “mosquito-proof” their homes and focus on prevention.

“We have to be vigilant,” he said. “We can’t assume there will be no cases this season.”

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