

So far this year, eight cases of West Nile virus have been reported to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services in Colfax, Scottsbluff, Lancaster, Valley, Cheyenne, Douglas, Sarpy and Burt counties. This is identical to the number of cases reported last year at this time.

Nebraska has had pools of mosquitoes in 14 counties test positive this season. Counties where positive mosquito pools have been identified are: Adams, Buffalo, Douglas, Garden, Garfield, Holt, Jefferson, Lancaster, Lincoln, Madison, Red Willow, Richardson, Sheridan and York.

The Department is releasing this update to make people aware that the virus is out there and they should take precautions.

“People shouldn’t be complacent,” said Dr. Joann Schaefer, Chief Medical Officer. “They should take precautions against mosquito bites. West Nile can be a very serious disease.”

The virus in previous years has been found in all counties in the state.

West Nile is transmitted through the bite of a mosquito that has picked up the virus by feeding on an infected bird.

To avoid mosquito bites, DHHS recommends:

- Applying mosquito repellent containing DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or IR3535;
- Wearing long-sleeved shirt, pants and socks;

Avoiding going out at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active; and

- Eliminating standing water to reduce mosquito breeding sites.

DHHS tests mosquitoes and birds to determine the level of virus in the state. No birds have tested positive yet. With the assistance of local health departments, DHHS is collecting and testing dead birds. To report dead birds, contact your local health department. To find your department, go to <http://www.hhs.state.ne.us/puh/oph/lhd.htm>.

Most people who are infected by a mosquito have no symptoms or only mild flu-like symptoms. Less than one out of 150 people who get bitten by an infected mosquito and become infected will get seriously ill.

However, people over 50 and those with weakened immune systems are especially vulnerable to the disease and are more likely to experience serious consequences.

West Nile fever includes flu-like symptoms such as fever and muscle weakness. Symptoms of the more serious West Nile encephalitis include inflammation of the brain, disorientation, convulsions and paralysis.

More information can be found on the HHSS Web site at www.dhhs.ne.gov.