Salt Lake County Reports First WNV Death of the Year

*Threat of West Nile virus grows as more mosquitoes in the county test positive*

SALT LAKE COUNTY—The Salt Lake County Health Department (SLCoHD) announced today the state’s first death this year due to West Nile virus (WNV). The deceased individual, who was over the age of 65 and suffered from other health concerns, was diagnosed with neuroinvasive West Nile virus, a more severe form of the disease, and passed away last week. Due to medical privacy laws, SLCoHD cannot release additional information about the decedent.

Health officials say this is an unfortunate reminder that West Nile virus is a serious concern. So far this season, the three Salt Lake County mosquito abatement districts have detected West Nile virus in 30 different mosquito pools* around the county.

“There are a growing number of mosquitoes in the county carrying the disease,” said Ilene Risk, SLCoHD epidemiology bureau manager, “so it is now especially important that residents be vigilant in protecting themselves from mosquito bites, particularly in the hours from dusk to dawn.”

Although only some mosquitoes carry WNV, there is no way for residents to tell which mosquitoes may be infected so it is important to minimize exposure opportunities during mosquito season:

- Use an EPA-registered mosquito repellent with DEET, permethrin, picaridin, IR3535 or oil of lemon eucalyptus; follow package directions about application.
- After dusk, wear long sleeves and pants
- Drain standing water in yards (old tires, potted plant trays, pet dishes, toys, buckets, etc.).
- Keep roof gutters clear of debris.
- Clean and stock garden ponds with mosquito-eating fish or mosquito dunks.
- Ensure door and window screens are in good condition so mosquitoes cannot get inside.
- Keep weeds and tall grass cut short; adult mosquitoes look for these shady places to rest during the hot daylight hours.

Most people with WNV may not know they have been infected. About 20% of people infected with WNV will develop West Nile fever, a mild illness that lasts 3–6 days and is characterized by fever, headaches and body aches. Less than 1% of people infected will develop West Nile neuroinvasive disease, which can result in high fever, neck stiffness, disorientation, coma, tremors, muscle weakness, convulsions or death. Symptoms of WNV infection usually appear within 3 to 14 days after exposure. There is no specific treatment for WNV infection other than to treat symptoms. If you think you have WNV infection, contact your health care provider.

People over age 50 and people with weakened immune systems are at the highest risk of illness due to WNV, but anyone can become ill from the bite of an infected mosquito.

Last year, 6 Utahns died from West Nile virus, including 2 in Salt Lake County.

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*“Mosquito pool” is the term used for a group of mosquitoes caught and tested out of a single trap; it is not related to swimming pools or pools of water.*