

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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West Nile virus arrives early in Kansas

TOPEKA, Kan. – The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) has discovered that four *Culex* species mosquito pools collected from traps in Reno, Shawnee and Johnson counties are positive for West Nile virus in preliminary testing, and that two birds in Shawnee County have tested positive for West Nile virus. In addition, Kansas is reporting the first case of West Nile virus in 2017 in a person from Barton County. These findings may indicate that West Nile virus transmission could occur much earlier in 2017 than in previous years.

The *Culex* species are known to transmit West Nile virus, but are not known to transmit Zika virus.

West Nile virus can be spread to people through bites from infected mosquitoes, but it is not contagious from person to person. Symptoms range from a slight headache and low-grade fever to swelling of the brain or brain tissue and in rare cases, death. People who have had West Nile virus before are considered immune.

KDHE has developed West Nile virus risk levels to help guide prevention efforts for both communities and individuals. These risk level reports will be posted weekly at http://www.kdheks.gov/epi/arboviral_disease.htm. All three regions of Kansas are currently at the high risk level.

KDHE recommends the following precautions to protect against West Nile Virus:

- When you are outdoors, use insect repellent containing an EPA-registered active ingredient on skin and clothing, including DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus or IR3535. Follow the directions on the package.
- Many mosquitoes are most active at dusk and dawn. Be sure to use insect repellent and wear long sleeves and pants at these times, or consider staying indoors during these hours.
- The elderly or immunocompromised should consider limiting their exposure outside during dusk and dawn when the *Culex* species mosquitos are most active.
- Make sure you have good screens on your windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out.
- Get rid of mosquito breeding sites by emptying standing water from flower pots, buckets and barrels. Change the water in pet dishes and replace the water in bird baths weekly. Drill holes in tire swings so water drains out. Keep children's wading pools empty and on their sides when they are not being used.

Cases are most common in the late summer and early fall. In 2012, there were 57 cases of West Nile virus in the state, the most cases since the virus first made its way into Kansas in 2002. More recently, in 2016, 34 cases were identified in Kansas. Among these cases, 21 were hospitalized, and there were five deaths. In addition to tracking cases of human illnesses caused by West Nile virus, KDHE assesses the potential for West Nile virus by conducting mosquito surveillance, including laboratory testing.

Birds generally are not tested for West Nile virus in Kansas, and KDHE will not be collecting information about dead birds. If you find a dead bird, KDHE recommends that you wear gloves, place the bird in a plastic bag, and dispose of it in the garbage.

KDHE maintains an Arboviral Disease Surveillance web page that is updated weekly at http://www.kdheks.gov/epi/arboviral_disease.htm. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides a web page with additional information about West Nile virus and preventing mosquito bites at <http://www.cdc.gov/features/StopMosquitoes/>.

For questions about West Nile virus or other Arboviral diseases, please contact the KDHE Epidemiology hotline at (877) 427-7317.

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KDHE's mission is to protect and improve the health and environment of all Kansans.