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## **Health Department Warns That Mosquitoes Infected With West Nile Virus Are on the Increase**

Tri-County Health Department is warning that they have seen an acceleration in the number of mosquitoes infected with West Nile virus. The health department traps and tests mosquitoes from various areas around the metro area, and has confirmed positive mosquito activity in Thornton, Brighton, Cherry Creek State Park, the western edge of Arapahoe County and near the town of Foxfield.

“We expect to confirm many more positive mosquitoes across the metro area in the coming weeks. There is no predicting human cases, but in our experience, increased mosquito activity foreshadows increased numbers of human cases. The vast majority of people who get West Nile virus are bitten by infected mosquitoes around their own home, not while on an outdoor adventure,” states Richard L. Vogt, MD, Executive Director of Tri-County Health Department. “Therefore, it is crucial that people reduce mosquito breeding areas around their home, and also use insect repellent and protective clothing to prevent mosquito bites— every time they are outdoors, whether in the backwoods or in their own back yard.”

Mosquito breeding is not limited to ponds and streams, so eliminating even small amounts of standing water around the house weekly is a good prevention measure. Common household items that can hold enough water for mosquitoes to breed include flowerpots and saucers; clogged rain gutters; tires and tire swings; sandbox toys; tin cans; and jars. Pet water bowls should be cleaned daily and birdbaths and wading pools should be hosed out weekly.

Vogt urges that people should use simple but effective protective measures to prevent infection from mosquito bites. These recommended mosquito precautions include the five D’s:

- DRAIN all standing water around the house to eliminate any mosquito-breeding sites
- DRESS in long-sleeved shirts, long pants, shoes and socks

- Use mosquito repellents that contain DEET while outdoors
- Avoid outdoor activities at DUSK and DAWN when mosquitoes are most active

The West Nile virus is carried long distances by infected birds and then spread locally by mosquitoes that bite these birds. Infected mosquitoes can then bite and pass the virus to humans. House pets do not become ill if bitten and do not spread the illness, and there is no human-to-human transmission by someone who already has the virus.

Most infections are mild and symptoms can include fever, headache, body aches, skin rashes and swollen lymph nodes. Symptoms usually appear 3 to 14 days after exposure. All residents of areas where West Nile virus activity has been confirmed are at risk, but people over age 50 seem to be especially vulnerable to the most severe forms of disease.

Signs of more severe illness may include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, muscle weakness or convulsions. Persons with these symptoms should seek medical attention immediately, because West Nile virus can also cause paralysis, encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) and/or meningitis (inflammation of the brain's lining). In some cases, it can be fatal.

Extensive information on West Nile virus, including personal protection ideas and a home and garden checklist can be found on the Tri-County Health Department website at [www.tchd.org](http://www.tchd.org), at [www.FightTheBiteColorado.com](http://www.FightTheBiteColorado.com) or by calling the toll-free Colorado HelpLine at 1-877-462-2911.

Tri-County Health Department and Boulder County Public Health recently published a study in *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, the monthly journal of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), revealing the considerable extent and ongoing harmful effects of West Nile virus infection. Though West Nile virus fever had previously been classified as a “mild illness” this study found that 20% of patients with a WNV fever diagnosis had symptoms for three months or longer. The complete study can be found online at [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/EID/vol12no07/05-1399.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/EID/vol12no07/05-1399.htm).

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