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Shelby County Health Department

News Release

Shelby County Health Department
814 Jefferson Ave., Memphis, TN 38105

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Tennessee Confirms Human West Nile Death in Shelby County

MEMPHIS, TN – The Tennessee Department of Health has confirmed the first death in Tennessee due to West Nile virus since 2009. The individual is a citizen of Shelby County. There have been 14 total human cases in Tennessee this year, nine of which were reported in Shelby County. The Shelby County Health Department urges citizens to continue to take precautions to prevent mosquito bites to protect themselves against West Nile virus.

“Although we have had much cooler temperatures in the past few weeks, the threat of mosquitoes is still present,” said Dr. Helen Morrow, Health Officer for the Shelby County Health Department. “We encourage residents and visitors to continue to take effective action to protect themselves from mosquito bites that could carry the virus.”

Mosquito populations are at their peak May through October. There is no human vaccine for West Nile virus; therefore, citizens are encouraged to be vigilant as it relates to controlling mosquito populations around their homes and businesses. Citizens are encouraged to:

- Wear DEET-containing mosquito repellants according to label directions
- Eliminate standing water where mosquitoes can lay eggs. Check properties for objects - including old tires, flower pots and drip plates, tin cans, buckets, and children’s toys - that collect rainwater and either drain or dispose of the water
- Install or repair windows and door screens
- Empty, clean and refill birdbaths and small wading pools weekly
- Empty and refill pets’ water bowls every few days
- Repair failed septic systems
- Repair leaky outside faucets
- Clean rain gutters and down spouts
- Secure swimming pool covers tightly and remove any standing water after rainfall
- Store wheelbarrows, canoes and boats upside down
- Stock ornamental lawn ponds with fish (Gambusia) that eat mosquito larvae (Gambusia fish are available FREE from the Vector Control Program)

“Vector Control has confirmed West Nile virus in mosquitoes found in all ZIP codes in Shelby County,” said Dr. Dan Sprenger, Manager of Shelby County Health Department’s Vector Control Program. “Although the counts are in decline, mosquitoes will continue to breed and present a risk for transmitting West Nile virus until after the first frost of the year.”

Humans can catch the West Nile virus through being bitten by an infected mosquito. Although West Nile virus can occasionally cause severe disease, most human infections are mild, resulting in fever, headache and body aches that last only a few days. Symptoms of severe disease include a high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma or convulsions. Persons over age 50 and those with compromised immune systems are at higher risk of severe disease. They should especially be careful to avoid mosquito bites.

Horses can also be infected with West Nile virus. Shelby County has had two confirmed cases of West Nile virus in horses this year and a total of three statewide. Horse owners should ensure their animals are current on vaccinations for West Nile virus as well as for equine encephalitis, which is also carried by mosquitoes.

For more information on West Nile virus, visit the Tennessee Department of Health website at <http://health.state.tn.us/CEDS/WNV/wnvhome.asp>.

(End of Report)