



The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services is reminding residents to protect themselves from mosquito bites. (Courtesy photo)

Deadly mosquito-borne virus suspected in West Michigan

From Staff Reports

LANSING — State health officials suspect that three West Michigan residents have contracted a mosquito-borne disease.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services stated in a press release on Aug. 26 there has been potential cases of Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) in three residents from Kalamazoo and Berrien counties.

In addition, a case of California encephalitis virus has been confirmed in a Genesee County resident. Six cases of the virus has been confirmed in horses in Barry, Kalamazoo and St. Joseph counties. None of the horses were vaccinated against EEE and all animals have died.

There is an EEE vaccine available for horses, but not for people. In addition, two deer in Barry and Cass counties have been diagnosed with EEE.

“Mosquito-borne diseases can cause long-term health effects in people and even death,” said Mary Grace Stobierski, MDHHS state public health veterinarian and manager of the Zoonotic and Emerging Infectious Diseases Section. “These cases, along with confirmed cases in horses and deer in the state, stress the importance of taking precautions against mosquito bites.”

EEE is one of the most dangerous mosquito-borne diseases in the United States, with a 33 percent fatality rate in people

quito bites:

- Apply insect repellents that contain the active ingredient DEET, or other U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-approved product to exposed skin or clothing, and always follow the manufacturer’s directions for use;

- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors. Apply insect repellent to clothing to help prevent bites;

- Maintain window and door screening to help keep mosquitoes outside;

- Empty water from mosquito breeding sites around the home, such as buckets, unused kiddie pools, old tires or similar sites where mosquitoes may lay eggs; and

- Use nets and/or fans over outdoor eating areas.

Signs of EEE include the sudden onset of fever, chills, body and joint aches. Symptoms of California encephalitis virus include fever, headache, nausea, vomiting, fatigue and lethargy.

Both diseases can develop into severe encephalitis, resulting in headache, disorientation, tremors, seizures and paralysis. Permanent brain damage, coma and death may also occur in some cases.

Additionally, West Nile Virus activity in Michigan has increased in wildlife and mosquito populations. Health officials have identified 18 positive mosquito pools and eight infected birds in the Lower Peninsula. No human cases of West Nile Virus have been reported.