

News Release

Contact: David Tonelli
(702) 383-6320
Jennifer Sizemore
(702) 383-1225

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Health District to Expand Surveillance for West Nile Virus

(Las Vegas, Nev., - June 30, 2004) - The Clark County Health District Environmental Health Division, in collaboration with the Nevada State Health Division and Clark County Vector Control, plans to expand mosquito-based testing for West Nile virus to neighboring Lincoln and Nye counties in mid July. West Nile virus is spread through the bite of infected mosquitoes, which acquire the virus by feeding on infected birds. To date, no West Nile virus activity has been detected in the Las Vegas valley.

“Although West Nile virus has not been detected in Clark County, virus activity has been high in neighboring states,” said Dr. Donald Kwalick, chief health officer for the health district. “Residents are reminded to take precautions to avoid mosquito bites, especially when traveling to mosquito-prone areas,” said Kwalick.

Three categories of surveillance are currently underway in Clark County: dead bird testing (crows, ravens and magpies), mosquito testing and sentinel chicken flock testing. “Our goal is to detect West Nile virus activity in the bird and animal populations, where it typically begins,” said Daniel Maxson, Environmental Health Supervisor for the district. “A positive indicator would provide an advance warning that people could be at risk of contracting West Nile virus infection in our area,” said Maxson.

The following preventive actions are recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to reduce individual risk of mosquito-borne illness:

- Apply an insect repellent containing DEET (N, N-diethyl-meta-toluamide).
- Wear pants and long-sleeved shirts, when outdoors.
- Avoid spending time outside when mosquitoes are most active, notably at dusk (the first two hours after sunset) and dawn.

- Eliminate areas of standing water, including bird baths and un-maintained swimming pools, which support mosquito breeding.
- Make sure doors and windows have tight-fitting screens without tears or holes.

The severity of illness associated with West Nile virus infection in humans can vary. Approximately 80 percent of people (about 4 out of 5) who are infected with West Nile Virus will not show any symptoms at all. Up to 20 percent of the people who become infected will develop symptoms similar to the flu, while about one in 150 people will develop severe illness.

Horses are also susceptible to West Nile virus. However, an equine vaccine is available. Horse owners are urged to contact their veterinarians about timely vaccinations.

The public is asked to assist in the health district's surveillance efforts by reporting ravens, crows or magpies that have been dead for less than 24 hours. Reports may be directed to the Clark County Health District Environmental Health Division at (702) 383-1251.

For more information on West Nile virus, visit the health district website at <http://www.cchd.org> or the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov>.

####