

As people spend time outdoors with summer activities, Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) reminds everyone to protect themselves against West Nile Virus.

West Nile Virus is spread through the bite of a mosquito that has contracted the virus from an infected bird. In 2012, 193 clinical cases and four deaths were reported through the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Division of Public Health.

SWNPHD provides surveillance data to DHHS by trapping mosquitoes in Chase and Red Willow counties. All human cases in southwest Nebraska are investigated by DHHS and SWNPHD. Nebraska Department of Agriculture handles any possible cases involving horses.

“One of your best defenses of preventing West Nile Virus is to apply mosquito repellent,” states Tami Herskowitz, public health surveillance nurse at SWNPHD. “Mosquito repellent helps reduce your exposure to mosquitoes that may carry the virus.”

Apply repellent to continue to play, work, and enjoy the outdoors with a lower risk of getting bit. Apply repellent when going outdoors, even if it’s only for a few minutes. The most effective repellents contain DEET.

Other precautions include dressing in long-sleeved shirts, pants and socks when outside. Avoid outdoor activity around dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are more active.

Eliminating the potential for breeding grounds around the home and spraying insecticide where adult mosquitoes hide, will certainly help reduce the mosquito menace around the property.

For example:

- drain children’s wading pools when not in use
- replace water in bird baths every three to four days
- drill a hole in tire swings so water can drain out
- check for clogged rain gutters and clean them out (roof gutters can produce millions of mosquitoes each season)
- remove discarded tires, and other items that could collect water
- clean vegetation and debris from the edges of ponds
- dispose of cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots or similar water-holding containers
- turn over wheelbarrows
- aerate ornamental pools or stock them with fish
- clean and chlorinate swimming pools not in use (watch for stagnant water on the pool cover)
- mosquitoes may breed in any puddle that lasts for more than four days

More information on West Nile Virus may be found at www.swhealth.ne.gov or call the McCook office at 308-345-4223.