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Mosquito season is here

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ATLANTA (GA) – Mosquito season has arrived and you can be sure that they are active, especially given the increased rainfall in recent weeks. Health officials with the Georgia Department of Human Resource (DHR), recommend that Georgians take caution against mosquito bites thus decreasing their chances of exposure to West Nile Virus (WNV).

"Abundant rainfall means there will be plenty of stagnant water remaining after the rains have stopped, which often leaves behind puddles and sources of stagnant water where mosquitoes breed," said Dr. Stuart Brown, director of the Division of Public Health. "To prevent mosquito bites, insect repellent use and wearing long pants and sleeves are effective but to stop mosquitoes at their source, Georgians should take care to tip over or toss out containers with standing water around their home."

Brown said this is important because eliminating mosquitoes before they become flying, biting adults will reduce the risk of West Nile Virus. Using Larvicide – substance that kills mosquito larvae – in large puddles that cannot be dumped or drained is also an effective method of eliminating mosquitoes.

The most common mosquito species known to Georgia that has been known to carry WNV are the Southern House Mosquito (*Culex quinquefasciatus*), and the Asian Tiger Mosquito, (*Aedes albopictus*) Both species are container breeding - able to breed in very small containers of water – species and generally stay fairly close to their breeding site. Generally the Southern House Mosquito is most active at dusk and can fly up to a half-mile for a blood-meal whereas the Asian Tiger Mosquito stays within 500 yards and is most active during the day making it equally as important for Georgians to protect against bites during the day as well as at night.

"Currently, the risk for exposure to WNV is very low but we anticipate mosquito populations to increase in the near future," said Brown. "Eighty percent of people that are bitten by infected mosquitoes will show no symptoms or sickness at all and less than one percent of people bitten by infected mosquitoes develop severe illness."

WNV can be transmitted to humans through the bite of mosquitoes infected with the virus. In most cases, a healthy immune system will fight off the virus but in rare cases, usually in elderly persons, persons with compromised immune systems or very young children, the disease can progress to the level of showing symptoms said Brown. In very rare cases, WNV can lead to encephalitis – swelling of the brain – and death.

Active surveillance of WNV has been ongoing since 2000 when the

existence of the virus was discovered in Georgia. The Metro Atlanta Surveillance Task Force (MASTF) was formed in 2000 to mount a unified response to the impending threat the virus posed for Georgia and the Atlanta area. The result was a collaborative regional approach to public education, environmental monitoring, and disease surveillance. The MASTF standardization committee was also formed to create standardized protocols for outbreak response. The subcommittee has completed standardized protocols for smallpox, meningitis, measles, and pertussis, and a guide to conducting public health investigations that involve multiple health districts. Currently the group is developing a standardized protocol for investigating cases of Hepatitis A. The work of MASTF, increased mosquito testing and trapping and expansion of web-based surveillance tools has greatly enhanced Georgia's surveillance of WNV and other diseases. To date there have been no human cases of WNV reported in Georgia.

For additional information regarding protection against West Nile Virus, see

<http://health.state.ga.us/epi/vbd/public.asp>

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/wnv_factSheet.html

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