

Press Release – For Immediate Release

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Maricopa County Public Health Confirms First Deaths of 2015 from West Nile Virus

PHOENIX (July 17, 2015) - After reporting 17 lab-confirmed human cases of West Nile virus (WNV) infection this season to date, Maricopa County Department of Public Health announced today two deaths related to the disease. The first victim was an East Valley man in his early 60s with underlying health issues. The second was an East Valley woman in her 70s who also had underlying health conditions. These are the first two deaths of the 2015 West Nile virus season.

“Sadly, we are reporting two East Valley residents who died from West Nile virus; however, we know that this disease is not limited to the East Valley,” said Dr. Bob England, director of Maricopa County Department of Public Health. “The early rains we had in June have now caught up with us and we are now seeing increases in infected people and mosquitoes throughout the Valley. This serves as a reminder to all of us all to do our part in protecting ourselves, our family and our neighborhoods.”

West Nile virus can cause severe illness in people and horses, although only about 20 percent of those infected will develop any symptoms at all. Those that do develop symptoms usually report fever, headache, body aches, and muscle weakness. Some people, especially the elderly, may experience more severe symptoms including high fever, severe headache, neck stiffness, and/or encephalitis or inflammation of the brain, which can lead to paralysis or death.

“So far we have confirmed 71 West Nile virus positive mosquito samples, which is twice as many as reported this time last year,” said Steven Goode, Maricopa County Environmental Services Department Director. “All this is a reminder of the importance in all of us doing our part in ridding our properties of standing water, where mosquitoes breed. A little effort can go a long way in protecting the whole community from West Nile virus and other mosquito-related diseases.”

West Nile virus is transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito. Maricopa County Health officials urge all people to “Fight the Bite” and follow simple precautions to avoid mosquitoes and the diseases they may carry:

- Use insect repellent. Apply on exposed skin when you go outdoors. Use an EPA-registered insect repellent such as those with DEET, picaridin, or even some oil of lemon eucalyptus products. Always read and follow all directions and precautions on the product label.
- Wear lightweight clothing that covers your arms and legs when outdoors. Make sure doors and windows have tight fitting screens and remain closed.
- Eliminate mosquito-breeding sites around the home by removing standing water in potted plants, tires, bird baths and other containers where water may collect.
- Ensure that swimming pools and decorative water features are properly maintained.
- Change water in flowerpots, birdbaths and pet watering bowls located outdoors at least twice per week.

West Nile virus was first found in Arizona in 2003. Since then, over 1,000 human cases have been reported. In 2014, Maricopa County had 93 cases and 12 deaths. In 2010, Maricopa County recorded its second worst West Nile virus season with 115 cases. (The worst season was in 2004 with 355 cases and 14 deaths.)

Maricopa County Environmental Services Department Vector Control continues to treat mosquito breeding habitats as well as fogging to kill the specific mosquitoes that spread West Nile virus. To report green pools or file a mosquito complaint, please call 602-506-6616 or visit FighttheBiteMaricopa.org.

For more information on fogging schedules, WNV or other mosquito related diseases, please visit FighttheBiteMaricopa.org.

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