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Media Contact:

Kim Junius, [kjuniu@scookcountyhhs.org](mailto:kjunius@cookcountyhhs.org)

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Take basic precautions to prevent West Nile virus while enjoying the summer weather

Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) officials would like to remind residents to be cautious and protect against West Nile virus (WNV) during the summer months. Prevention is the most effective way to protect yourself and your family from becoming infected with WNV.

“We find West Nile virus in our communities every year,” said Dr. Rachel Rubin, CCDPH Co-Lead and Senior Medical Officer. “For some who become infected, it can be very debilitating. There are basic things we can do to Fight the Bite and prevent mosquitoes from breeding or biting.”

WNV is an infection carried by the Culex mosquito, which breeds in small pools of stagnant water. They rest during the day in areas of vegetation but they are most active and likely to bite between the hours of dusk and dawn. The most effective way to prevent WNV is to practice the 3 R’s:

- **Remove** standing water around your home.
 - Get rid of standing water in pet bowls, flower pot saucers, old tires, bird baths, baby pools and toys where mosquitoes can breed.
 - Make sure rain gutters drain properly.
- **Repel** mosquitoes when outdoors by applying insect repellent with DEET and follow label directions.
- **Repair** or replace torn screens on doors and windows.

Most human cases occur in the late summer and early fall. Four out of five people infected with WNV will not show any symptoms. But illness can occur 3-15 days after an infected mosquito bite and cause symptoms of fever, headache and body aches. People over the age of 50 and those with chronic diseases such as heart disease or cancer may be more at-risk for serious complications from encephalitis or meningitis. For that reason, people who experience high fever, confusion, muscle weakness, severe headaches, or a stiff neck should see a doctor immediately.

CCDPH conducts surveillance between May and October each year to identify mosquitoes, birds and humans positive for West Nile virus. For the latest information on where WNV is circulating and to report dead birds, please visit www.fightthebitecookcounty.com, and follow us on social media at www.facebook/ccdph and www.twitter/cookcohealth.

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