

Deadly EEE Virus Discovered in Upstate New York

uticaod - Tests found 28 mosquitoes collected in the northwestern Oneida County town of Vienna carried a virus potentially deadly to both humans and horses, the Oneida County Health Department said this morning.

The mosquitoes tested positive for Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE), last reported in the county four years ago. At that time, the death of a pony was attributed to EEE, resulting in the aerial spraying of a 5-mile radius around the farm where the animal died. The location of that 2006 case could not be immediately learned.

This year, anyone who visits woodlands or works outdoors in Vienna is at greater risk of infection from the virus because of exposure to potentially infected mosquitoes, the health department said.

"The location of the collection site, one of 12 in the county, suggests an expansion of infected mosquito activity in neighboring Oswego County, which has reported 14 positive pools since June," Oneida County Director of Health Dr. Gayle Jones said.

The species of infected mosquito usually bites birds, so transmission of the disease to humans would require a species of mosquito capable of creating a "bridge" between infected birds and uninfected mammals, Jones said.

While human infection is rare, when it does occur, symptoms develop within 4 to 10 days of exposure from a mosquito bite. Symptoms may include a headache, high fever and vomiting, progressing into disorientation, seizures and a coma. One-third of infected people die from the disease, while many who survive must live with brain damage.

Diagnosis is made through spinal fluid testing. There is no specific treatment for EEE.

The health department offered these tips for people to reduce risk of infection in the Vienna area:

- * Use insect repellent containing DEET on exposed skin and clothing.
- * Wear long sleeves and long pants when possible.
- * Have secure and intact screens on windows and doors.
- * Empty standing water from flower pots, buckets, barrels and children's wading pools. Drill holes in swings so water drains off them. Turn children's pools upside down when not in use. Standing water is where mosquitoes breed.

CDC - Eastern Equine Encephalitis

Eastern equine encephalitis virus (EEEV) is transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) is a rare illness in humans, and only a few cases are reported in the United States each year. Most cases occur in the Atlantic and Gulf Coast states (see map). Most persons infected with EEEV have no apparent illness. Severe cases of EEE (involving encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain) begin with the sudden onset of headache, high fever, chills, and vomiting. The illness may then progress into disorientation, seizures, or coma. EEE is one of the most severe mosquito-transmitted diseases in the United States with approximately 33% mortality and significant brain damage in most survivors. There is no specific treatment for EEE; care is based on symptoms. You can reduce your risk of being infected with EEEV by using insect repellent, wearing protective clothing, and staying indoors while mosquitoes are most active. If you think you or a family member may have EEE, it is important to consult your healthcare provider for proper diagnosis.

NOTE: EEEV was one of more than a dozen agents that the United States researched as potential biological weapons before the nation suspended its biological weapons program. 30-35% of infected humans die, and half of survivors are left with severe neurological impairment