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Precautions to reduce risk of contracting West Nile Virus

Norristown, PA (August 15, 2012) – Since surveillance testing has indicated West Nile virus (WNV) activity is present throughout the county, the Montgomery County Health Department wants to remind residents that the risk of WNV is strong and may remain so for some time this season, thus the focus should be on personal protection.

There have been 75 mosquito pools which tested positive for WNV so far this season, compared to 31 positive pools during the same period last year. The first positive test was reported on May 17 this year, compared to June 9 last year. A mosquito pool is a collection of mosquitoes (usually about 50) of any given species or group (i.e. Culex mosquitoes) that are likely to carry/transmit a virus.

WNV is transmitted to people by infected mosquitoes. In the United States, most people are infected from June through September, and the number of these infections usually peaks in mid-August. Seasonal outbreaks often occur in local areas that can vary from year to year. Many factors impact when and where outbreaks occur, such as weather, numbers of mosquitoes that spread the virus, and human behavior.

Josh Shapiro, chair of the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners, urged residents to take commonsense precautions to prevent West Nile Virus. “The best way to avoid the disease is to avoid mosquito bites, and the best way to avoid mosquito bites to eliminate mosquito breeding areas,” Shapiro said.

Shapiro pointed to the health department’s list of steps as a good place to start:

- Identify and eliminate all sources of standing water that collects on your property. Mosquitoes will breed in any puddle that lasts for more than four days.
- Dispose of tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots or similar water holding containers that have collected on your property. Do not overlook containers that have become overgrown by aquatic vegetation.
- Pay special attention to discarded tires that may have collected water on your property. They can serve as a breeding ground for mosquitoes.
- Drill holes in the bottom of recycling containers that are left out of doors. Drainage holes that are located on the container sides collect enough water for mosquitoes to breed in.
- Have clogged roof gutters cleaned on an annual basis, particularly if the leaves from surrounding trees have a tendency to block drains.
- Turn over plastic wading pools when not in use. A wading pool becomes a place for mosquitoes to breed if it is not used on a regular basis.
- Turn over wheelbarrows and do not allow water to stagnate in birdbaths.
- Aerate ornamental pools or stock them with fish. Water gardens are fashionable but become major mosquito breeding grounds if they are allowed to stagnate.
- Keep swimming pools clean and chlorinated. A swimming pool that is left untended becomes a source of mosquito breeding. Be aware that mosquitoes may even breed in the water that collects on swimming pool covers.

Approximately one in five people who are infected with West Nile virus will develop symptoms such as fever, headache, body aches, joint pains, vomiting, diarrhea, or rash. Less than 1 percent will develop a serious neurologic illness such as encephalitis or meningitis (inflammation of the brain or surrounding tissues).

People over 50 years of age and those with certain medical conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, hypertension, kidney disease, and organ transplants, are at greater risk for serious illness.

There are no medications to treat, or vaccines to prevent, West Nile virus infection. People with milder illnesses typically recover on their own, although symptoms may last for several weeks. In more severe cases, patients often need to be hospitalized to receive supportive treatment, such as intravenous fluids, pain medication, and nursing care. Anyone who has symptoms that cause concern should contact a health care provider.

To find out more information about West Nile Virus, visit the Health Department webpage at www.health.montcopa.org. Residents can also receive information about planned spraying for mosquitoes by signing up for ReadyNotifyPA at http://montco.alertpa.org.