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ODH: TAKE STEPS TO PREVENT MOSQUITO-BORNE ILLNESSES

COLUMBUS – It’s time once again for Ohioans to take simple steps to protect themselves from mosquito-borne diseases, particularly West Nile virus (WNV), the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) said today.

“West Nile virus infection is preventable,” said ODH Director J. Nick Baird, M.D. “By taking some simple steps, you can help ensure you and your loved ones remain healthy and safe when outside this spring and summer.”

In 2004, Ohio reported 12 probable and confirmed human cases of WNV and two WNV-related deaths; in 2002, Ohio reported 441 human cases and 31 deaths.

Although cases of WNV have decreased considerably since 2002, this unpredictable virus could return at higher levels in 2005. WNV activity is closely linked to short-term weather patterns and if Ohio has a wet spring followed by a dry summer, activity could increase, state health officials said.

To avoid possible infection from mosquito bites:

- Avoid outdoor activities between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active.
- If you must be outdoors, be sure to wear long pants, long-sleeved shirts, shoes and socks. Light colors are least attractive to mosquitoes.
- Use insect repellent containing DEET, picaridin or lemon eucalyptus oil and follow the label directions; generally a concentration of 30 percent DEET for adults and 10 percent or less for children.

To eliminate mosquito breeding sites near your home:

- Remove all discarded tires and other water-holding containers such as tin cans and unused flower pots, from your property. Eliminate standing water from your property.
- Make sure all roof gutters are clean and properly draining.
- Clean and chlorinate pools, outdoor saunas and hot tubs. Keep them empty when not in use and drain water from pool covers.
- Change water in bird baths weekly.

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By following this advice and filling in water-holding holes in trees, residents can also protect themselves against La Crosse encephalitis, which is spread by the “treehole” mosquito. Since 1963, Ohio has recorded 986 cases of La Crosse encephalitis in 80 counties resulting in 8 deaths.

Other mosquito-transmitted diseases in Ohio include Eastern Equine encephalitis and St. Louis encephalitis.

People who have symptoms – including high fever, headache, muscle aches, vomiting and loss of appetite – two to 15 days after a mosquito bite should see their doctor and tell him or her about the encounter.

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