

Mosquito Alert

The recent rainstorms bring much needed water to the Palm Beach County (PBC) area, but it can also increase the number of mosquitoes looking for a blood meal. Mosquitoes are a nuisance, and unfortunately they can also transmit diseases. Diseases that are transmitted by insects are known as arboviruses. These diseases include viral encephalitis, yellow fever, and malaria in which the latter two occur rarely in the US.

Most viral encephalitis infected birds or small mammals, but can transmit to humans. The major types of viral encephalitis in the US include St. Louis, LaCrosse, Eastern equine, Western equine, and the newly emerging West Nile virus. Human cases of arbovirus infection can cause mild symptoms such as headache, fever, dizziness, and joint pain, but the infection can become fatal as it progresses to encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or coma.

The Florida Department of Health along with other state and local agencies are working to detect viral diseases spread by mosquitoes to humans and animals. Flocks of chickens are monitored for the presence of arboviruses. The chickens are a good surveillance tool because the chickens do not get sick from the viruses. PBC residents can also help by reporting cases of dead birds found in the area, which may have succumb to an arbovirus.

To control the number of mosquitoes, the PBC Mosquito Control Office does apply control spraying to kill the adult mosquitoes. Chemical agents are also put into retention ponds and other flooded areas to eliminate the larvae that may be present in the water. The good news is that most canals and ponds in Florida have a minnow that eat mosquitoes. The mosquito fish can be added to newly flooded areas as a biological friendly method to control mosquitoes in water.

People are encouraged to take basic precautions to help limit their exposure to mosquitoes and prevent arboviral disease....

1. Avoid outdoor activities one hour before and one hour after dusk and dawn.
2. Wear protective clothing such as long pants, long sleeved shirt, socks and shoes when mosquitoes are present.
3. Use mosquito repellent and follow manufacturer's directions.
4. Repair torn screening on windows, porches, and doors.
5. Eliminate mosquito-breeding sites by cleaning out gutters, troughs, and removing old tires that fill with water. Also, turn over or remove unused pots for plants, and replace water in birdbaths at least once a week.

When mosquito populations are large and an arbovirus is detected, everyone should do their part in helping to eliminate and prevent the spread of disease from these annoying and sometimes dangerous insects. Further information can be found at http://www.doh.state.fl.us/disease_ctrl/epi/htopics/arbo/index.htm and <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm> or by calling the PBC Mosquito Control Office at (561) 967-6480.