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## **West Nile Virus Remains Active in Yakima County**

### ***Fight the Bite this Fourth of July Weekend!***

**Yakima, WA** – Mosquitoes positive for West Nile Virus have been found near Byron Ponds/Grandview in south Yakima County. The mosquitoes were trapped by the Benton County Mosquito Control District as part of their disease tracking program. Most of us will be heading outdoors for Independence Day this weekend. YHD hopes these positives will encourage residents and visitors to protect themselves from mosquitoes during festivities.

“Mosquito repellent can be applied in less time than it takes most of us to send a text message,” notes Laura Charters, Environmental Health Specialist the Yakima Health District (YHD). “Spray-type repellents can be applied in seconds, lotion-type in a minute or two. That’s nothing compared to the time you’ll spend sick or in the hospital if you get WNV.”

Many people will never know they were even infected with WNV. Only one in five people (20%) bitten by an infected mosquito will get sick. Most get a very mild illness. Less than one percent develops severe illness. **The problem is that, until you’re sick, you don’t know whether you’ll be among those who get no symptoms, mild illness, severe illness, or die from WNV.**

Yakima County has led the state in the total number of birds, horses, and mosquito pools positive for WNV in recent years. In 2009, there were also 21 confirmed human cases of West Nile virus in Yakima County alone. That is the highest number of any county in the state – more than all other counties combined. And the disease didn’t just target one age group. Cases ranged in age from 6 to 86 years old. Seventeen cases had to be hospitalized, many in intensive care. Some are still recovering. One, tragically, died. This was the first death caused by WNV in the state of Washington.

“We’ve got to stop thinking that WNV is just some disease that only people in other counties or states get,” warns Charters. “People in our communities have gotten sick from WNV. People in our communities have died from WNV. That’s the reality and tragedy of this disease in our area. You have to protect yourself.”

You should take these steps to prevent mosquito bites and WNV:

1. **Avoid mosquito bites.** Avoid being outside at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active. Cover your skin by wearing long pants, long-sleeved shirts, socks, and shoes. Note that some mosquitoes can bite through thinner fabrics. Mosquito repellents containing DEET, Picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or IR3535 are safe and highly effective against mosquitoes. Some can also be applied to clothing for added protection. Be sure to read and follow label instructions for the product you're using. You should also screen windows and doors that remain open for ventilation to protect yourself indoors.
2. **Prevent mosquitoes from multiplying.** Mosquito eggs grow in standing water in less than a week. Change water in pet bowls, animal troughs and bird baths at least once a week. Fix leaky faucets that can create puddles. Empty saucers for potted plants regularly. Check gutters to make sure they drain properly.

WNV illness typically occurs 3-14 days after you are bitten by an infected mosquito. Mild illness usually goes away without medical help. Symptoms include fever, headache, body aches, rash, and swollen lymph nodes. A less common but more serious form of WNV disease affects less than one percent of people who get sick. Symptoms include neck stiffness, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, paralysis, or death. People experiencing any of the above symptoms should consult their medical provider at once.

For more information on West Nile virus, visit <http://yakimahealthdistrict.org/commhealth/vwnv.htm>. You can also sign up to receive general health messages by following us on Twitter. Go to [www.twitter.com/yakimahealth](http://www.twitter.com/yakimahealth) to sign up!