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Six Yakima County Residents Hospitalized with Mosquito-Borne Illness

August 24, 2009 (Yakima, WA)— The Yakima Health District (YHD) is currently investigating six reported illnesses of mosquito-borne infection thought to be West Nile Virus (WNV), St. Louis Encephalitis (SLE), or Western Equine Encephalitis (WEE). The individuals range in age from six to over 80 years of age and are from both the upper and lower valleys of Yakima County. All six individuals were hospitalized at some point, though three have since been released. Laboratory results are pending.

"We are following the clinical progress of the affected individuals closely," states Dr. Devika Singh, the Deputy Health Officer for the Yakima Health District. "We anticipate more illnesses in the upcoming weeks, but hope that with effective public health outreach we can prevent cases by encouraging necessary precautions among our residents."

In 2008, two locally-acquired human cases of WNV were confirmed in Yakima County—one male and one female who tested positive late in the mosquito season. However, this is the fifth year running that WNV has been detected in Yakima County horses, birds, and/or mosquitoes. Historically, other mosquito-borne illnesses such as SLE and WEE have also been identified in the county.

"Although summer is coming to a close, the mosquito season will remain in full swing for the next couple of months." comments Laura Charters, Environmental Health Specialist with the Yakima Health District. "To avoid additional illnesses during this time, residents of Yakima County must to take steps to protect themselves from mosquitoes."

The steps individuals can take to avoid mosquito-borne illnesses like WNV, SLE and WEE are the same:

1. **Eliminate standing water that mosquitoes breed in.** Anything that can hold water can become a mosquito breeding ground in less than a week. Health officials recommend changing water in pet bowls, animal troughs and bird baths at least once

weekly, fixing leaky faucets that can create puddles and emptying saucers for potted plants regularly.

2. **Avoid being bitten by mosquitoes altogether.** Screen windows and doors that remain open for ventilation. When possible, avoid being outside at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active. People should also cover their skin by wearing long pants, long-sleeved shirts, socks, and shoes. Mosquito repellants containing DEET, Picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or IR3535 are safe and effective against mosquitoes when used according to label instructions.

Symptoms of mosquito-borne illnesses can include headache, neck stiffness, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, paralysis, or even death. Anyone experiencing any of the above symptoms should consult their medical provider immediately.

Mosquito activity tends to cease when the first overnight frost occurs in the fall (usually in late October or early November).

For more information on mosquito-borne illness like WNV, visit the YHD Website at www.yakimapublichealth.org. You can also get news about WNV in Yakima County and the state by following the YHD on twitter at: www.twitter.com/yhd_wnv.

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