

Contact: Name
Organization
Telephone Number

For Immediate Release

Day of Week, Month, Date, 2003

TIPS OFFERED ON PROTECTIONS AGAINST WEST NILE VIRUS

(Name, title and organization) said (Day of Week) that colorful, informational materials on West Nile virus and how to prevent the spread of the disease will be (or are available) available at the (name and address of the local health department or county public health nursing service) beginning Monday, April 7.

The theme of the statewide informational campaign is, "Fight the Bite! Join the 'Swat Team' Against West Nile Virus."

The materials are being unveiled now to mark the opening of the Colorado Observance of 2003 National Public Health Week, which began (or begins) on Monday, April 7, and will continue through Sunday, April 13.

The informational materials, which are printed in both English and Spanish, include laminated wallet cards, posters and brochures.

A Web site at www.fightthebitecolorado.com also has been established to serve as a source of information for children and adults on the virus and on how to combat it. The Web site also contains instructional materials that can be downloaded and used by teachers.

The virus, which was first identified in the United States in 1999 when it was found in New York City, was confirmed in Colorado in mid-August last year.

(Last name) said, "The West Nile virus season won't be here for several months but local residents can begin now to protect themselves and their families against it by doing some spring cleaning."

"Public health agencies in Colorado are recommending that breeding places for mosquitoes be removed by cleaning out gutters and by removing old tires and other similar debris where water can collect. A check also should be made to make certain all house screens are in good repair and that all holes in screens are repaired," (Last Name) said.

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(Last Name) continued, “Then Coloradans will be ready when mosquito season actually arrives in mid-summer. At that time, they should begin wearing repellent and shirts with long sleeves and pants to avoid mosquito bites and can begin to avoid going outside at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are feeding.”

The informational materials also were (or are to be) unveiled at a news conference (to be held) held at the Colorado State Capitol in Denver at 1 p.m. on Monday, April 7, in which Governor Bill Owens participated. Presiding at the news conference was Douglas H. Benevento, the executive director of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

Dr. Ned Calonge, the state’s chief medical officer who is based at the department; John Pape, an epidemiologist who is leading the department’s effort to curtail the spread of West Nile Virus; and Dr. Wayne Cunningham, the state veterinarian who is based at the Colorado Department of Agriculture, were available (are scheduled to be available) at the news conference to answer questions.

Recommendations for defending against mosquitoes and the West Nile virus they carry were:

- Drain standing water around the house since it’s where mosquitoes lay eggs, including tires, cans, flowerpots, clogged rain gutters, kiddie pools and puddles. Trim grass and shrubs and don’t over water lawns and gardens.
- Dress in long sleeves and pants when outdoors to prevent bites.
- Wear insect repellent containing DEET. Always follow label instructions for skin and clothes. Products with 10 percent or less DEET are recommended for children.
- Dusk/dawn are when mosquitoes are most active, so stay inside and avoid shrubs where they hide.

(Last Name) said that most people will not even know that they have been infected by West Nile virus even if they contract it from an infected mosquito.

(Last Name) said, “A few people will suffer mild symptoms while an even smaller number will exhibit a more serious illness, which will include a stiff neck, high fever or severe headache. Persons who experience the more severe symptoms should contact their health care provider immediately.”

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However, (Last Name) warned persons over the age of 50 to be particularly careful about taking the precautions because they can be particularly hard hit by the virus. Persons in this age group also are more likely to die from this disease, (Last Name) said.

The virus is carried by mosquitoes, which take blood meals from infected birds, and then pass the disease onto humans when they bite them.

The informational materials were designed by a committee composed of public information officers who represent the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and the state's 15 local health departments and 39 county public health nursing services.

The committee was chaired by Gary Sky, the public information specialist for the Tri-County Health Department, which serves Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas counties.

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Editor's Note: The "Fight the Bite" logo can be downloaded by going to Colorado West Nile Virus Web site at www.fightthebitecolorado.com Click on the 'downloadable materials' section, where you will find the logo, which is downloadable as a PDF file. Simply click on the logo and it will open.