

Beaufort County News Release

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH AREA | COMMUNICATIONS AND ACCOUNTABILITY DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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West Nile Virus Detected in Beaufort County Mosquitoes; DHEC Urges Residents to Prevent Mosquito Bites

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) and Beaufort County officials announced late today that a few samples of mosquitoes trapped in Beaufort County have tested positive for West Nile virus.

"Identifying mosquitoes carrying West Nile virus in our state is not uncommon," said Chris Evans, Ph.D. and DHEC's staff entomologist. "A positive identification should serve as a reminder of the importance of preventing mosquito bites. It's the most important step you can take to prevent the spread of illness from mosquitoes to humans."

"The mosquito carrying this virus is usually active at night, but can also be active at dusk and dawn and in shady areas during the day," Evans said. "As the state's public health agency, we partner with jurisdictions across the state to help trap and identify mosquitoes carrying diseases that can be spread to humans. The virus actually starts with a bird. It spreads when a mosquito bites a bird that has the virus in their blood. The mosquito then can spread the virus to other birds, animals or people, when it bites during feeding."

"We have strategically applied public health insecticides in Beaufort County" said Gregg Hunt, Beaufort County Mosquito Control Director. "Our trucks operate during nighttime hours when these mosquito species are most active. The insecticide that we use is very effective, and was selected because it should have a quick knockdown."

"Most people infected with West Nile virus have no symptoms," said Linda Bell, M.D. and state epidemiologist. "The risk of serious illness such as encephalitis, a potentially fatal inflammation of the brain, occurs in less than one percent of people infected."

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](http://www.cdc.gov), symptoms of West Nile virus disease include the following:

- **No symptoms in most people.** Most people (70-80%) who become infected with West Nile virus do not develop any symptoms.
- **Febrile illness in some people.** About 1 in 5 people who are infected will develop a fever with other symptoms such as headache, body aches, joint pains, vomiting, diarrhea, or rash. Most people with this type of West Nile virus disease recover completely, but fatigue and weakness can last for weeks or months.
- **Severe symptoms in a few people.** Less than 1% of people who are infected will develop a serious neurologic illness such as encephalitis or meningitis (inflammation of the brain or surrounding

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- tissues). The symptoms of neurologic illness can include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, disorientation, coma, tremors, seizures, or paralysis.

"If you have concerns about the virus or develop symptoms, you should contact your health care provider," Bell said.

DHEC was notified June 23 of the virus-positive mosquitoes taken from the Beaufort County area.

"There have been no confirmed transmissions of West Nile virus to humans here in Beaufort County or South Carolina this year," said R. Taylor Lee, Low Country Regional Health Director. "We will continue to monitor going forward."

DHEC recommends residents pay attention to the most effective ways to prevent mosquito-borne illnesses:

- Apply insect repellent containing DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or IR 3535 according to label instructions. Repellents help keep mosquitoes from biting.
- Wear clothing that reduces the risk of skin exposure.
- Exposure to mosquitoes is most common at night and during the early morning. Some species bite during the day, especially in wooded or other shaded areas. Avoid exposure during these times and in these areas.
- Make sure that your doors and windows have tight-fitting screens to keep out mosquitoes.
- Eliminate all sources of standing water on your property, including flowerpots, gutters, buckets, pool covers, birdbaths, old car tires, rain gutters and pet bowls.

Officials emphasize the public plays a vital role in controlling the spread of all mosquito-borne diseases.

"Mosquito control workers can't do it alone," Hunt said. "We need residents to help."

Dead birds can help DHEC and local partners track West Nile virus. Residents can report the finding of dead birds to DHEC. Learn how [here](#). Also, residents and visitors can use a Beaufort County Mosquito Control app to report dead birds. Learn how [here](#) or [here](#). DHEC is currently accepting submission of birds through November 30.

For more information about preventing mosquito bites and the spread of West Nile virus and other mosquito-borne illnesses, go to www.scdhec.gov/mosquitoes Learn more about West Nile virus at www.scdhec.gov/westnile.

Notes to editors:

Feel free to include this brief video statement from Linda Bell, M.D., DHEC State Epidemiologist, discussing West Nile virus in any of your coverage: <https://youtu.be/hl69ytA-D1w>