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Malheur County has Oregon's first human West Nile cases of 2008

The first human cases of West Nile fever in Oregon this year have been reported in Malheur County.

State health officials say the appearance of the cases should be a reminder to avoid mosquito bites – particularly with outside activities during the coming Labor Day weekend.

Malheur County health officials say three people were reported during the last week of July to be infected. All are recovering. Malheur County is a well-known hot-spot for West Nile activity.

Emilio DeBess, an epidemiologist with the Oregon Department of Human Services State Public Health Division, said the cases should alert Oregonians to the need for precautions against the virus, which is transmitted to humans by mosquitoes.

Most infections are mild, with fever and flu-like symptoms but severe infections may cause inflammation of the brain and, rarely, death.

DeBess said health officials encourage people who have West Nile symptoms to see their doctors for testing and follow-up care.

In 2007 Oregon recorded 27 human cases of West Nile virus, with two cases acquired by Oregonians who became infected in other states.

Most of the human cases in 2007 occurred in eastern Oregon, with 12 cases originating in Malheur County.

West Nile virus is transmitted to people by mosquitoes. Birds are the principal carriers of the virus. Infected birds are bitten by mosquitoes, which pick up the virus and carry it to people.

WNV Prevention Advice

- Use insect repellents containing DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon, eucalyptus, or IR3535.
- Avoid being outdoors when mosquitoes are most active.
- Wear long sleeve shirts, long pants, and a hat to reduce bites.
- Check screen doors and windows for openings that might allow mosquitoes indoors.
- Decrease standing water to the greatest extent possible, particularly around the home.

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