

To: Students, Faculty and Staff

Subject: West Nile Virus Precautions

There has been a higher than usual number of human West Nile Virus cases in Texas this year due to the warm winter and recent rains, particularly in our area. We, along with Tarrant County Public Health, are urging people to take precautions to reduce the risk of contracting West Nile Virus, a mosquito-borne illness. Some of the most effective ways are to use insect repellent when outdoors, regardless of the length of time going to be spent outside, and avoid being outdoors from dusk to dawn when possible or if without repellent and appropriate clothing.

Humans can get West Nile Virus from a bite from an infected mosquito and mosquitoes get the virus from feeding on infected birds or other mammals. West Nile Virus can cause serious illness or death. West Nile neuroinvasive disease symptoms include stiff neck, visual problems, body tremors, mental confusion, memory loss and seizures. The milder form of the illness is West Nile fever and symptoms include fever, headache, muscle and bone aches, and nausea.

People with the milder form of illness typically recover on their own, although symptoms may last for several weeks. Up to 80 percent of people infected with West Nile Virus will have no symptoms and will recover on their own.

There are no medications to treat or vaccines to prevent West Nile Virus infection. People over 50 years old and those with compromised immune systems are at a higher risk of becoming seriously ill when they become infected with the virus. If people have symptoms and feel sick enough, they should contact their healthcare provider.

To reduce exposure to West Nile Virus, remember the “Four D’s”:

- DUSK to DAWN is the time of day to limit outdoor activities because this is when infected mosquitoes are most active.
- DRESS in long sleeves and pants when outside. For extra protection, thin clothing can be sprayed with repellent.
- DEET is an ingredient to look for in an insect repellent. Use an approved insect repellent every time you go outside and follow the instructions on the label.
- DRAIN standing water in old tires, flowerpots, clogged rain gutters, empty cans, and buckets. Mosquitoes breed in stagnant water.

It is also a good idea to use air conditioning or make sure there are screens on all doors and windows to keep mosquitoes from entering the home.

For more information on West Nile Virus and statistics, visit <http://tcweb.tarrantcounty.com/ehealth>.