

November 29, 2017

West Nile Virus detected in sentinel chickens in Mobile County

MOBILE, Alabama – Three sentinel chickens used by the Mobile County Health Department (MCHD) to detect mosquito-borne diseases in the community have tested positive for West Nile Virus (WNV). The chickens were located in the following ZIP codes: 36605, 36521 and 36582. This brings the number of positive WNV tests to four this year for the sentinel chicken program.

WNV, which is a form of mosquito-borne encephalitis, has been confirmed by laboratory results, according to Dr. Bernard H. Eichold II, Health Officer for the Mobile County.

“The public should assume that there are mosquitoes carrying the disease throughout Mobile County,” Eichold said. “Don’t let your guard down.”

The risk of encephalitis spread by mosquitoes is highest from August through the first freeze in the fall, Dr. Eichold said. Jerry Folsie, the director of MCHD’s Vector Services, said his department will increase spraying and conduct door-to-door surveys in the immediate area. Inspectors will also attempt to trap adult mosquitoes and test them for the presence of WNV.

Blood is drawn from the sentinel chickens every Monday by Vector Services. The samples are sent to a lab in Tampa, Florida.

Health officials warn that it is extremely important that people taking part in outdoor activities make every effort to reduce their exposure to mosquitoes and should keep mosquito repellent with them at all times when outdoors. Mosquito activity peaks at dusk and again at dawn.

WNV is transmitted from bird to mosquito to bird. Mosquitoes can spread these viruses by feeding on the blood of infected birds and then biting another host animal or mammal such as a human or a horse.

Although humans and horses can become ill from the infection, the disease cannot be spread from people or horses. The likelihood of transmission to humans and horses can be decreased by personal mosquito avoidance and the use of WNV and Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) vaccines in horses. There are no WNV or EEE vaccines available for humans.

For approximately 25 years, Vector Services has been monitoring encephalitis in sentinel poultry flocks strategically placed in 13 coops throughout the county to detect the presence of viruses carried by mosquitoes. Mosquitoes also are trapped throughout the county and tested for WNV, EEE and St. Louis Encephalitis.

To report an issue with mosquitoes, call Vector Services at 251-690-8124. To learn more, please visit <http://mchd.org> and under “Services” select “Vector Control.”