

September 19, 2019

West Nile Virus detected in sentinel chickens in Mobile County

MOBILE, Alabama — 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 in the 36521, 36582 and 36613 ZIP codes. This brings the total for 2019 to four positive results. At this time last year, MCHD had a total of 38 positive WNV tests in the sentinel flock.

A human case also was reported on September 11. Because of patient privacy rights under the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), no additional identifying information will be made available on that case.

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 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. Paul Efird, an entomologist who oversees MCHD’s Vector Services, said his department will increase spraying and conduct door-to-door surveys in the immediate areas. 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, and the samples are sent to a lab in Tampa, Florida. The results of the tests are available later that week.

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 almost 30 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.”