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## **STATE AGENCIES CONTINUE TO WORK TOGETHER TO PROTECT FLORIDIANS AGAINST ARBOVIRUSES**

TALLAHASSEE—Even though the medical alert for West Nile Virus (WN) and Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) will be lifted at the end of the year, the Florida Department of Health (DOH), Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC), Florida Mosquito Control Association, and state universities will continue to work together year-round to protect people and animals against mosquito-borne encephalitis.

According to DOH Secretary **John O. Agwunobi**, M.D., M.B.A., the medical alert that covered 53 counties encouraged Floridians to take basic precautions to help limit their exposure to mosquitoes, eliminate mosquito-breeding sites around their homes, have their horses vaccinated, and to report dead birds via the Internet. “We have seen a significant drop in mosquito activity and in positive tests for the diseases among our sentinel chickens and reported dead birds,” said Agwunobi.

“It’s unfortunate that the West Nile Virus has made its way to our state, but now that it is here it is incumbent on state agencies to continue to take steps to protect our citizens and animals,” FDACS Commissioner **Charles Bronson** said. He added: “It is also important for residents to be vigilant about protecting themselves during mosquito season, to keep an eye on their horses to ensure they are not exhibiting symptoms of the disease and especially to provide horses with timely vaccinations now that a vaccine is available.”

State officials stressed that while the chance of humans contracting WN or EEE is reduced, people in areas with high concentrations of mosquitoes still need to take precautions, such as wearing mosquito repellent. Additionally, as this is the first year that WN virus has been found in the state, officials encourage anyone who discovers a dead bird to report it via the Internet. The reporting system is located on the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission’s Web site at: <http://wld.fwc.state.fl.us/bird>. If people do not have access to the Internet, they may report dead birds at 1-800-871-9703.



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A total of 11 human WN and three human EEE cases were reported to the State Health Office during 2001. The number of dead birds that were found with WN in Florida was over 800, along with close to 200 sentinel chickens testing positive for the disease. FDACS reports over 400 horses in the state contracted WN, and over 40 horses were infected with EEE. Horses should always be vaccinated against both EEE and WN by a licensed veterinarian.

For more information on West Nile virus, visit DOH's Bureau of Epidemiology's West Nile Web site at MyFlorida.com (click on Health and Human Services, then Consumers – Diseases and Conditions, then West Nile Virus), or [http://www.doh.state.fl.us/disease\\_ctrl/epi/htopics/arbo/index.htm](http://www.doh.state.fl.us/disease_ctrl/epi/htopics/arbo/index.htm) or call the Bureau's hotline at 1-888-880-5782 for recorded information. The Department of Agriculture also has a Web site with information about West Nile at <http://doacs.state.fl.us/ai/westnile>.

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