Jeb Bush
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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

John O. Agwunobi, M.D., M.B.A., M.P.H.
Secretary

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Contact: Lindsay Hodges
850-245-4111

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH OFFICIALS CONTINUE TO EMPHASIZE PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES TO PREVENT MOSQUITO-BORNE ILLNESSES

--Prevention steps are critical in protecting against illnesses--

TALLAHASSEE — Florida Department of Health (DOH) officials today emphasized the importance of Florida's residents and visitors protecting themselves against mosquito-borne diseases. Throughout the year, DOH works with partner agencies, including the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, mosquito control agencies and state universities, to monitor for the presence of mosquitoes carrying illnesses. So far in 2005, Florida has reported four confirmed cases of Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) and eight confirmed cases of West Nile (WN) virus. Nearly 20 counties have detected the presence of WN virus in surveillance populations, while 46 counties have reported EEE virus activity to date.

"Mosquito-borne illnesses are preventable by taking a few simple steps to avoid mosquito bites," said DOH Secretary John O. Agwunobi, M.D., M.B.A., M.P.H. "With most of the counties in Florida reporting the presence of at least one virus transmitted by mosquitoes, it is critical that all Floridians work to curb the spread of these illnesses."

Symptoms of WN virus infections, St. Louis Encephalitis (SLE), and EEE may include headache, fever, fatigue, dizziness, weakness and confusion. Physicians should contact their County Health Department if they suspect an individual may have a mosquito-borne illness. DOH laboratories provide testing services for physicians treating patients with clinical signs of mosquito-borne disease.

There were a total of 42 confirmed human WN virus disease cases resulting in two deaths in Florida in 2004, compared to 94 cases with six deaths in 2003. In 2002, there were 35 cases with two deaths. Additionally, no human EEE or SLE cases were reported in 2004 to the Florida State Health Office.

DOH continues to advise the public to remain diligent in their protecting themselves from mosquito bites by following the "5 D's," which include:

- **D**usk and **D**awn – Avoid being outdoors when mosquitoes are seeking blood. For many species, this is during the dusk and dawn hours.
- **D**ress – Wear clothing that covers most of your skin.
- **D**EET – When the potential exists for exposure to mosquitoes, repellents containing DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide, or N,N-diethyl-3-methylbenzamide) are recommended. Picaridin and oil of lemon eucalyptus are other repellent options.
- **D**rainage – Check around your home to rid the area of standing water, which is where mosquitoes can lay their eggs.

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Tips on Repellent Use

- Always **read label directions carefully** for the approved usage before applying a repellent to skin. Some repellants are not suitable for children.
- Products with concentrations of up to 30 percent DEET are generally recommended. Other potential mosquito repellents, as reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in April 2005, contain picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus. These products are generally available at local pharmacies. Look for active ingredients to be listed on the product label.
- Apply insect repellent to exposed skin, or onto clothing, but **not under clothing**.
- In protecting children, read label instructions to be sure the repellent is **age-appropriate**. According to the CDC, mosquito repellents containing oil of lemon eucalyptus should not be used on children under the age of 3 years. DEET is not recommended on children younger than 2 months old.
- Infants should be kept indoors or mosquito netting should be used over carriers when mosquitoes are present.
- **Avoid applying repellents to the hands of children.** Adults should apply repellent first to their own hands and then transfer it to the child's skin and clothing.
- If additional protection is necessary, apply a permethrin repellent directly to your clothing. Again, always follow the manufacturer's directions.

Tips on Eliminating Mosquito Breeding Sites

Elimination of breeding sites is one of the keys to prevention.

- Clean out eaves, troughs and gutters.
- Remove old tires or drill holes in those used in playgrounds to drain.
- Turn over or remove empty plastic pots.
- Pick up all beverage containers and cups.
- Check tarps on boats or other equipment that may collect water.
- Pump out bilges on boats.
- Replace water in birdbaths and pet or other animal feeding dishes at least once a week.
- Change water in plant trays, including hanging plants, at least once a week.
- Remove vegetation or obstructions in drainage ditches that prevent the flow of water.

Additionally, officials encourage anyone who discovers a dead bird to report it via the Internet. The bird mortality reporting system is located on the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's website at: www.myfwc.com/bird/ . If people do not have access to the Internet, they may report dead birds to their county health department or local FWCC office.

For more information on mosquito borne illnesses, visit the DOH website at: www.doh.state.fl.us, the CDC website at: www.cdc.gov, or call your local county health department.

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