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For Immediate Release
December 13, 2002

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HUMAN CASE OF WEST NILE VIRUS CONFIRMED IN SARASOTA COUNTY

TALLAHASSEE—The Florida Department of Health (DOH) today confirmed the 28th human case of West Nile (WN) virus encephalitis in Florida this year – in a 71-year-old Sarasota County resident. This is the second case of WN virus in Sarasota County this year, which has been under medical alert for the virus since September 9.

“Due to Florida’s warm climate, the potential for exposure to the West Nile virus is a year-round issue,” said DOH Secretary John O. Agwunobi, M.D., M.B.A. “As it is now mid-December and we are still seeing cases, we are reminded of the ongoing importance of the precautions we all must take to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes.”

The following 39 counties are now under medical alert for WN virus and other mosquito-borne diseases: Alachua, Brevard, Charlotte, Citrus, Clay, Collier, DeSoto, Duval, Escambia, Flagler, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Hernando, Highlands, Hillsborough, Indian River, Jackson, Lake, Lee, Levy, Manatee, Marion, Martin, Okeechobee, Orange, Osceola, Palm Beach, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, Putnam, Santa Rosa, Sarasota, Seminole, St. Johns, St. Lucie, Sumter and Volusia counties.

Agwunobi recommends people take the following precautionary measures to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes:

- Avoid outdoor activities when mosquitoes are active, especially at dusk and dawn;
- If you must be outdoors when mosquitoes are active, cover up by wearing shoes, socks, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt. Additional protection can be obtained by applying permethrin repellent directly to clothing;
- For adults and children older than two months of age, the best protection is achieved by using mosquito repellent containing 30 percent DEET (N,N-Diethyl-meta-toluamide also called N,N-diethyl-3-methylbenzamide) according to manufacturer’s directions. Greater concentrations provide no additional benefits and risk increased incidence of side effects. For children younger than two months of age DEET is not recommended; use protective clothing and cover with mosquito netting; and
- Eliminate stagnant water in birdbaths, ponds and other receptacles in which mosquitoes might breed by emptying or changing.

The Department of Health laboratories provide testing services for physicians treating patients with clinical signs of mosquito-borne (arboviral) disease. These signs may include headache, fever, fatigue, dizziness, weakness and confusion. Physicians should submit serum and, if available, cerebrospinal fluid samples to either the Tampa or Jacksonville Department of Health laboratories. People over the age of 50 are at the greatest risk of having severe disease from an arbovirus infection.

DOH continues to conduct statewide surveillance for arboviruses, including West Nile (WN) virus, Eastern Equine Encephalomyelitis (EEE) and St. Louis Encephalitis (SLE). Residents of Florida are encouraged to report dead birds by calling the West Nile Virus Hotline at 1-800-871-9703, or via the Web site www.wildflorida.org/bird. For more information on WN virus, visit the DOH Bureau of Epidemiology’s Web site at www.doh.state.fl.us (click on Epidemiology, then Health Topics), call the Bureau’s hotline at 1-888-880-5782 for recorded information, or call your local county health department.

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