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Take precautions to avoid mosquito bites and the diseases they carry

Ithaca, Stanton, St. Johns- That annoying buzzing sound you hear when you are trying to enjoy the great outdoors is a dead give-away that a pesky mosquito is near. Yes, mosquitoes are incredibly annoying and relentless, but did you know they can also be dangerous?

Mosquitoes are known carriers of Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) and West Nile Virus (WNV), diseases they contract when feeding on infected birds and then pass on to humans, horses, and other mammals. These diseases cannot be passed between mammals, but the discovery of six cases of EEE in horses in Montcalm County and one case of WNV in a human in Clinton County indicate that these diseases are in the area.

Symptoms of EEE in humans include the sudden onset of fever, chills and body and joint aches. EEE infection can develop into severe encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), resulting in headaches, disorientation, tremors, seizures, and paralysis. Permanent brain damage, coma, and death may also occur in some cases.

Symptoms of EEE in horses can include fever, head pressing, wandering, and stumbling, and can progress to an inability to stand.

Most people who contract WNV have no symptoms, but those who do become ill three to 15 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito. Symptoms of West Nile virus can include high fever, confusion, muscle weakness, stiff neck, and a severe headache. More serious complications include meningitis (inflammation of the spinal cord and brain linings) and encephalitis (inflammation of the brain). These diseases usually require hospitalization, can be life threatening, and even fatal.

Here are several ways you can protect yourself and your family from mosquitos and the diseases they can carry:

- Avoid outdoor activities between dusk and dawn, when mosquitos are most active.
- Apply insect repellent that contains DEET or Picaridin, or other U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-approved product to exposed skin (following the manufacturer's directions for use), to everyone over six months of age.
- Treat clothing with repellent.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors.
- Maintain window and door screens to help keep mosquitoes outside.
- Empty water from mosquito breeding sites around the home, such as buckets, unused kiddie pools, old tires, or similar sites where mosquitoes may lay eggs.
- Cover cribs, strollers, and baby carriages with mosquito netting.
- Use nets and/or fans over outdoor eating areas.

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2- EEE and WNV

Ways you can protect your horses and other domestic animals from include:

- Vaccinate horses against EEE
- Place horses and livestock in a barn under fans from dusk to dawn
- Use an insect repellent on animals that is approved for the species
- Eliminate standing water on your property and changing water in buckets and bowls at least once a day.

Mosquito-borne illnesses, like WNV and EEE will continue to pose a risk to both animals and humans until late fall when nighttime temperatures consistently fall below freezing.

Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.

We take action to protect, maintain and improve the health of our community.

Advancing innovative solutions to achieve healthier outcomes

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