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West Nile virus mosquito found

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Tuesday, August 01, 2017

GREENFIELD — West Nile Virus has been found locally. State health agents recently trapped a mosquito carrying the disease.

“It is normal. That’s the whole reason we monitor,” said Cheryl Volpe, registered nurse at Greenfield’s Public Health department. “We’re in season, there’s an expectation for positive mosquitos.”

The mosquito carrier, a *Culex* species, was found July 17 according to a state report. Positive samples were also recently found in East Longmeadow, Richmond, and Pittsfield. There haven’t been any reported cases in people or animals in 2017 compared to 16 human cases last year. West Nile Virus isn’t usually serious. Deerfield Board of Health Chairwoman Carolyn Shores Ness said “70 to 80 percent of the people who contract West Nile have no symptoms. And if you did have symptoms, it would be mild flu symptoms.”

Finding mosquito carriers is less common in Franklin County “versus an area like Springfield or Boston, because they’re more concentrated, with more standing water,” Volpe said.

In response to the report, Deerfield’s Board of Health issued a statement warning “please use extra caution when outdoors during high mosquito times of day. We will keep the public up to date on information as it becomes available.”

Throughout the summer, the state Department of Public Health routinely monitors mosquito samples for West Nile Virus. Experts expect higher than average counts this year because of high rainfall and more standing water.

“We’re seeing 500 to 700 percent increase in the mosquito. The reason why is we’re having regular precipitation in fairly good quantity,” Ness said, adding that last year “the drought really killed off what was circulating.”

To prevent virus spread, Deerfield’s statement says to wear long clothing, use insect repellent and be aware of peak mosquito hours, which are from dusk to dawn. At home, eliminate standing water. “Check rain gutters and drains. Empty any unused flowerpots and wading pools, and change the water in birdbaths frequently,” the statement says.

Elsewhere, "water troughs provide excellent mosquito breeding habitats and should be flushed out at least once a week during the summer months to reduce mosquitoes near paddock areas. Horse owners should keep horses in indoor stalls at night to reduce their risk of exposure to mosquitoes." Animal owners are advised to seek out mosquito repellents and vaccinations.

For more information, including where positive mosquitos have been found, can be found on the state's Arbovirus Surveillance Information website, www.mass.gov/dph/mosquito, or by calling the Department of Public Health's Epidemiology Program at 617-983-6800.
