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### **Health Department Confirms First Human West Nile Virus Case in NM in 2009 State Encourages New Mexicans to Protect Themselves Against Mosquitoes**

(Santa Fe) – The New Mexico Department of Health announced today that a 70-year-old man from Eddy County has been diagnosed with West Nile Virus infection. The man is in critical condition at University of New Mexico Hospital in Albuquerque. He has the more severe clinical form of West Nile Virus with both encephalitis and meningitis. This is the first human case of laboratory-confirmed West Nile Virus infection in New Mexico in 2009.

“It’s important to remember that older adults are more susceptible to developing serious complications from West Nile Virus, and they need to be especially careful to avoid mosquito bites,” said the Department of Health’s State Epidemiologist C. Mack Sewell.

Paul Ettestad, the Department’s public health veterinarian, said people should protect themselves by using a repellent when they are outdoors, especially during the evening and early morning when mosquitoes are most active. “We’re seeing West Nile Virus activity in different areas of the state, and we expect it could be throughout New Mexico so everyone needs to be careful,” Ettestad said.

To protect yourself from West Nile:

- Use insect repellent on exposed skin and clothing when you go outdoors. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends repellents containing DEET, Picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or IR3535 for use on skin, and permethrin for use on clothing. Always follow label directions when using insect repellents.
- When weather permits, wear protective clothing such as loose-fitting, long-sleeved shirts, long pants and socks.
- The hours from dusk to dawn are peak biting times for mosquitoes. Take extra care to use repellent and protective clothing, or avoid outdoor activities during these times.
- Eliminate water-holding containers where mosquitoes lay their eggs, such as old tires, and regularly change the water in birdbaths, wading pools and pet water bowls. Make sure rain barrels are tightly screened.
- Keep windows and doors closed if not screened. If you leave your house doors or windows open, make sure they have screens that fit tightly and have no holes.
- Vaccinate your horses to protect them from West Nile Virus and Western Equine Encephalitis, which is also carried by mosquitoes.

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Common West Nile Virus symptoms are fever, nausea, headache, and muscle aches. In rare cases, West Nile Virus can cause meningitis or encephalitis. If someone has these symptoms, they should see their health care provider. People older than 50 are at most risk for serious disease from West Nile Virus.

Both meningitis and encephalitis can be fatal, especially in the elderly. However, most people who become infected have either no symptoms or have only mild symptoms, and less than 1 percent of all people infected, including those who have no symptoms and have not been tested, develop meningitis or encephalitis. Meningitis is an infection of the lining around the brain, while encephalitis is an infection of the brain itself.

In 2008 there were a total of eight cases of West Nile Virus in New Mexico with no fatalities. In 2007, New Mexico had 60 human cases of West Nile Virus with three fatalities. For more information about West Nile Virus, including fact sheets in English and Spanish, go to the Department's website at [www.nmhealth.org/epi/wnv.html](http://www.nmhealth.org/epi/wnv.html).

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