

West Nile found in Lee chickens

Mosquito expert says there's no need to panic

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What are the symptoms?

About 80 percent of people infected with West Nile will not show any symptoms. Up to 20 percent may have fever, headache, body aches, nausea, vomiting, swollen lymph glands or skin rashes. About one in 150 people infected may experience high fever, headache, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness or paralysis.

How does it spread?

Typically, mosquitoes become infected by feeding on infected birds. Mosquitoes then spread the virus to humans and other animals they bite.

When can you get it? It flares up in the summer and continues into the fall.

How do you prevent it? Use insect repellent or cover up with clothing when outdoors, use screens on doors and windows and dispose of any standing water where mosquitoes could breed.

— Center for Disease Control and Prevention

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Although West Nile virus has been discovered in four chickens tested by the Lee County Mosquito Control District, an expert says there's no need to panic.

"It's not uncommon to find a few chickens turning positive in our flock," said Shelly Redovan, Mosquito Control spokeswoman. "That happens almost every year. That alone does not give us a real alarm."

West Nile Virus is a potentially serious illness that in the most severe cases can cause paralysis or coma, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

The agency keeps 17 flocks of chickens at pens throughout the county so it can test them for mosquito-transmitted diseases.

One test result came back positive for West Nile around June 13, and the other three positive tests came about two weeks later, Redovan said.

The blood samples tested are always sent to the state to confirm the results. The state confirmed the positive results about a week ago.

Two of the positive chickens were in North Fort Myers — one off Metro Parkway and the other in Lehigh Acres. Mosquito control increased pesticide spraying in the affected areas.

The Collier County Mosquito Control District has not found any instances of West Nile, said Marin Brouillard, a biologist with the agency.

Collier does not keep chickens, instead testing for West Nile by grinding up samples of mosquitoes and putting them in a digital reader. The reader will then give a positive or negative reading.

"I've been here for 11 years and I've used a couple methods to test mosquitoes for West Nile, and I think I've only found a couple pools that tested positive for West Nile," Brouillard said.

"It's kind of like finding a needle in a haystack when you think about all the mosquitoes that are out there," she added. "But we still do it."

The most recent documented human case of West Nile virus in Lee County was in November 2010, according to Diane Holm, Lee County Health Department spokeswoman.

The News-Press last reported a case in October 2010. That case was only the seventh in Lee County history, and none has been fatal. In September 2010, the virus contributed to the death of a Collier man.

Previous to that, Lee and Collier counties were put on a medical alert in 2003 because of the virus.

Though four infected chickens do not pose a huge threat, Redovan suggests people wear repellent if they plan to be outside in mosquito-infested areas.

"I don't see this as something to personally panic about, but we really do encourage everyone to protect themselves from mosquito bites," she said. "It doesn't have to be carrying a disease to be harmful maybe in some ways to you and your children."