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# Lubbock County sees first case of St. Louis Encephalitis Virus

The city of Lubbock Health Department confirmed Tuesday the first case of St. Louis Encephalitis virus for 2010.

Posted: October 13, 2010 - 12:46am

By Sarah Nightingale

AVALANCHE-JOURNAL

The city of Lubbock Health Department confirmed Tuesday the first case of St. Louis Encephalitis virus for 2010. It is Lubbock County's first case since 2004.

The department has also seen seven human West Nile virus cases this year, including one death, said Beckie Brawley, public health coordinator for the Health Department.

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St. Louis Encephalitis virus (SLEV) and West Nile are both spread to humans by infected mosquitoes, said Steve Presley, an associate professor at Texas Tech's Institute of Environmental and Human Health.

People here are at risk because trees and water in Lubbock and the surrounding towns create "artificial gardens of Eden" for birds carrying the virus, Presley said.

The Health Department recommended people avoid being out at dusk and dawn, wear protective clothing, use DEET-containing insect repellents and drain standing water.

Symptoms of West Nile and SLEV can be mild or severe, starting with fever, and any of the following: weakness, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, eye pain, headache, muscle aches, swollen glands, rash, stiff neck, disorientation and altered level of consciousness.

The elderly and those with weakened immune systems are at higher risk of developing severe West Nile and SLEV symptoms. Symptoms can develop within three to 15 days.

About 20 percent of people infected with West Nile develop a mild infection called West Nile fever and less than one percent develop a serious disease called West Nile neuroinvasive disease, according to the Mayo Clinic. The serious form of the disease can include inflammation of the brain, the membranes surrounding the brain, and the

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spinal cord.

SLEV symptoms tend to be milder than West Nile, but the most serious consequence is encephalitis, or swelling of the brain. The Lubbock County infection was in a non-elderly woman who did not develop a brain infection, Brawley said.

While West Nile virus was not seen in the United States until 1999, 1,015 cases of SLEV were confirmed in Texas between 1964 and 2007, Presley said. Cases were reported on the South Plains as far back as the 1940s, and there was an outbreak in 1963 and 1964, he said.

The 2010 case is unlikely to indicate an epidemic, since cooler weather has caused mosquito numbers to decline, Presley said.

The city is also spraying for mosquitoes, Brawley said. But anyone experiencing symptoms should contact a doctor, she said.

"The mosquitoes will be out and about until the first freeze," she said.

To comment on this story:

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**Protect yourself**

- Avoid being out when mosquitoes feed, especially at dawn and dusk.
- Wear long sleeves and pants when outdoors.
- Use DEET-containing repellents. Spray outer clothing with repellent as mosquitoes can bite through thin fabric.
- Avoid use of perfume and other scented cosmetics, which can attract mosquitoes.
- Install or repair window and door screens.
- Get rid of standing water around the area.
- Keep yard and alley mowed. Mosquitoes hide in tall brush and grasses.
- Consult your physician for any illness that you suspect may be West Nile or SLEV.

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