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For Immediate Release

The New York State Department of Health is urging New Yorkers to take personal protective measures to avoid mosquito bites.

Mosquitoes usually are considered a nuisance pest, but occasionally they can transmit viruses to people and some animals. These viruses can cause illness and even death. While your chances of being infected with a disease through a mosquito bite are very small, there are simple steps you can take to reduce your risk of being bitten.

West Nile Virus is a mosquito-borne infection that can cause serious illness and occasionally death. Many people who contract the virus do not experience any symptoms of illness, while an estimated 20 percent of infected people develop mild symptoms including fever, headache and body aches, skin rash or swollen lymph glands.

In addition to West Nile, mosquitoes may also carry Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE).

EEE is a rare, but extremely serious viral disease spread by mosquitoes that can affect people and horses. People of all ages are susceptible to infection, but people over 50 and younger than 15 are at greatest risk for acquiring the virus. While most people bitten by an infected mosquito will not develop any symptoms, severe cases begin with the sudden onset of headache, high fever, chills and vomiting.

There is no commercially available human vaccine for either West Nile Virus or EEE, so the best way to protect yourself is to keep mosquitoes from biting you. Antibiotics do not treat viral infections. Patients are treated for their symptoms and provided supportive therapy. People with mild cases of EEE and WNV usually recover completely. One of the best ways to do this is to take steps to reduce the number of mosquitoes around your home or property, including eliminating standing water in yards, by:

- Disposing of used tires, tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots or similar containers in which water collects.
- Drilling holes in the bottoms of recycling containers that are kept outdoors.
- Making sure roof gutters drain properly; cleaning clogged gutters in the spring and fall.
- Turning over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use and changing the water in bird baths twice a week.
- Cleaning vegetation and debris from the edges of ponds.
- Cleaning and chlorinating swimming pools, outdoor saunas and hot tubs, and draining water from pool covers.

Be aware of where mosquitoes live and breed and keep them from entering your home.

- Mosquitoes lay their eggs in standing water. Weeds, tall grass, and bushes provide an outdoor home for the adult *Culex pipiens* mosquito (the common northern house mosquito), which is most commonly associated with West Nile virus.

- Mosquitoes can enter homes through unscreened windows or doors, or broken screens. Make sure that doors and windows have tight-fitting screens. Repair or replace all screens in your home that have tears or holes.
- Resting mosquitoes can often be flushed from indoor resting sites by using sweeping motions under beds, behind bedside tables etc. and once in flight, exterminated prior to sleeping at night.

Repellents also provide protection against tick and mosquito bites. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend choosing a repellent that contains DEET, IR3535, or oil of lemon eucalyptus for use on skin. Clothing and gear, such as boots, pants, socks and tents, can be treated with products containing permethrin. (Permethrin should not be used on skin.) Treated clothing or gear remains protective through several washings. Pre-treated clothing is also available and remains protective for up to 70 washings. For all repellents, follow the label directions and apply in small amounts, avoiding contact with the eyes, nose or mouth. Use only small amounts when applying repellents on children.

For more information on West Nile virus visit: www.health.ny.gov/diseases/west_nile_virus/fact_sheet.htm.

For more information on eastern equine encephalitis virus visit:
www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/eastern_equine_encephalitis/fact_sheet.htm.

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