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**Western New York Public Health Alliance Press Release – Zika Update**

**Protect Yourself Against Mosquito-Borne Diseases**

The Western New York Public Health Alliance (WNYPHA) is urging residents and visitors to take precautions to avoid mosquito bites and protect themselves from potential exposure to the mosquito-borne diseases. The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) has a robust mosquito surveillance program which includes regularly testing mosquito pools in various areas of Western New York and across New York State.

“New York State is home to about 70 different types of mosquitoes and while most of them are not infected with disease-causing viruses, some are and serious viral diseases such as West Nile Virus, Eastern Equine Encephalitis, and Zika Virus, are transmitted to people through the bite of an infected mosquito,” said Christine Schuyler, co-chair of the WNYPHA and Public Health Director for Chautauqua County. “Different diseases are caused by different viruses and transmitted by different mosquito species and the key to safeguarding against these illnesses is to take basic precautions to avoid mosquito bites.”

People are urged to follow these precautions to defend against mosquito bites:

- Use insect repellent properly. Those that contain DEET, picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus are most effective but should be used with care. Read the product label and use according to package instructions.
- Limit outdoor activities in areas where mosquitoes are most active and between dusk and dawn which is the peak mosquito biting time.
- If you have to be outside, wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, shoes and socks as weather permits.
- Repair or replace all window and door screens to keep mosquitoes outside.
- Reduce or eliminate all standing water.
- Empty or dispose of pails, cans, flower pots, or similar water-holding containers.
- Clear roof gutters, remove leaf debris from yards and gardens, and clean vegetation and debris from the edge of ponds.
- Turn over wheelbarrows and wading pools when not in use.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools, outdoor saunas and hot tubs and drain pool covers.
- Clean vegetation and debris from the edges of ponds
- Change the water in birdbaths and horse troughs twice a week.
- Dispose properly of old tires

The highest risk of contracting mosquito-borne illnesses runs from June through September with peak activity late July to August.

**Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE)**

Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) is a rare illness in humans but often a deadly disease. It is transmitted by mosquitoes and can affect humans, birds, horses and other mammals. Most

people bitten by an infected mosquito will not develop any signs; however, of those who do, symptoms usually appear four to ten days later. Signs of EEE infection begin with a sudden headache, high fever, chills and vomiting. The illness may then progress into disorientation, seizures, coma or inflammation of the brain (encephalitis). It causes death in most cases; however, some people will survive the infection and have mild to severe brain damage for life. There is no specific treatment for EEE; care is based on symptoms.

While people of all ages are at risk for EEE infection, children under age 15 and adults over age 50 have the greatest risk for contracting the severe disease.

### West Nile virus (WNV)

West Nile virus (WNV) is also a mosquito-borne infection that can cause illness and occasionally death. Symptoms of the WNV usually develop within 3 to 14 days after exposure; however, it may take up to three weeks for signs to appear in those with weakened immune systems. Many people who contract WNV do not experience any type of illness; an estimated 20 percent of people who become infected will develop mild symptoms including fever, headache, body aches, vomiting, diarrhea and possibly a skin rash or swollen lymph glands. The person's health usually improves after several days, but they may feel tired, weak and generally unwell for weeks. Less than 1 percent of people infected will develop severe symptoms that affect the central nervous system. These include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, muscle weakness, disorientation, tremors, convulsions, paralysis, coma, or inflammation of the brain (encephalitis) or of the membranes of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis). Most people will recover completely from WNV, even from a severe infection although in rare cases, death can occur.

While people of all ages are at risk for WNV infection, adults age 50 and older and people with certain medical conditions such as cancer, diabetes, hypertension, kidney disease, and organ transplants are at the greatest risk of developing serious symptoms.

### Zika Virus

Zika is a virus that is usually spread by certain kinds of mosquitos. It can also be spread from one person to another through sexual contact or blood transfusion. For most people it is a mild infection with few or no symptoms. But it has been linked to health problems in some people. It is a serious concern for pregnant women, their partners and couples planning a pregnancy because it can cause serious birth defects. Zika is not spread from person to person by casual contact.

There have been several outbreaks of Zika virus in Central America, South America, the Caribbean, the Pacific Islands, Mexico, Puerto Rico and Southeast Asia. Recently, a small number of Zika infections have been discovered in parts of Florida and Texas that were likely spread by mosquitoes. To date, the only cases in New York State are in people who acquired the virus while traveling to Zika affected areas or through sexual transmission from someone who had traveled to those areas.

Once a person has been infected, he or she is likely to be protected from future infections. Right now, there is no vaccine to prevent Zika. Public health officials are working hard to learn more about Zika. In the meantime, they are strongly encouraging people to avoid mosquito bites and to control mosquito populations to help make sure Zika doesn't become widespread in the U.S. Infection with Zika virus is usually mild. Only about one in five people develop any symptoms; hospitalization is rare. If someone is going to have symptoms, they usually start between 2-7 days after exposure. No vaccines or medications are available to prevent or treat Zika virus infections, however the symptoms can be managed. This includes getting plenty of rest, drinking fluids to

prevent dehydration, and taking medicines, such as acetaminophen, to relieve fever and pain. Because other infections can look like Zika virus, aspirin and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), like ibuprofen and naproxen, should be avoided until other illnesses can be ruled out.

### Vaccine

**There is no commercially available human vaccine for WNV, EEE or Zika.** The best way to protect yourself is to keep mosquitoes from biting you. EEE and WNV vaccines are available for **horses** in consultation with a veterinarian.

For more information on WNV, EEE and Zika, contact your Local Health Department or visit:

- [www.health.ny.gov/diseases/west\\_nile\\_virus/fact\\_sheet.htm](http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/west_nile_virus/fact_sheet.htm)
- [www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/eastern\\_equine\\_encephalitis/fact\\_sheet.htm](http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/eastern_equine_encephalitis/fact_sheet.htm).
- [https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/zika\\_virus/index.htm](https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/zika_virus/index.htm)

The NYSDOH 2012 Mosquito Borne Illness Surveillance & Response Plan can be found at:

[http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/west\\_nile\\_virus/docs/2012\\_mosquito\\_borne\\_illness\\_surveillance\\_and\\_response\\_plan.pdf](http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/west_nile_virus/docs/2012_mosquito_borne_illness_surveillance_and_response_plan.pdf)

The NYSDOH 2016 Statewide Mosquito-Borne Disease Activity Report can be found at:

[https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/west\\_nile\\_virus/docs/weekly\\_arboviral\\_surveillance\\_report.pdf](https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/west_nile_virus/docs/weekly_arboviral_surveillance_report.pdf)

The Western New York Public Health Alliance (WNYPHA) is a not-for-profit organization comprised of the Health Commissioners/Public Health Directors and other community public health leaders from the eight counties of Western New York. Their mission is to support collaboration across WNY to further public health initiatives and priorities. As part of this mission, the WNYPHA works to provide health education and information to prevent disease and improve population health.