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Health officials confirm first two West Nile cases in Riverside County

A 65-year-old Mecca woman and 71-year-old man from Coachella are the first two confirmed human cases of West Nile Virus in Riverside County this year, said Dr. Cameron Kaiser, county public health officer.

The illness was confirmed recently and Riverside County officials were notified this week. The individuals are expected to recover.

The virus is transmitted to humans and animals through a mosquito bite. The mosquito becomes infected when they feed on infected birds. Health officials emphasized the risk of serious illness to humans is low and most individuals who are infected will not experience any illness. Elderly individuals and those with compromised immune systems are at greatest risk for serious illness.

“While West Nile is rarely life-threatening, it can occasionally be serious,” Kaiser said. “Unlike the common cold which is easily transmitted, the West Nile virus can only be spread by mosquito bites, and there are easy steps to take to reduce your risk of getting bitten.”

Here are some ways to protect yourself:

- Avoid spending time outside when mosquitoes are most active, especially at dawn and dusk, and wear long pants, long-sleeved shirts and other protective clothing outside.
- Apply EPA-registered insect repellent that contains DEET.
- Make sure doors and windows have tight-fitting screens. Repair or replace screens that have tears or holes.
- Eliminate all sources of standing water on your property, such as old tires, buckets, flowerpots and toys that can support mosquito breeding. Empty and scrub the water sources. Some mosquitoes can even breed in the amount of water that fits in a bottle cap.

There were 15 human cases reported during 2018 in Riverside County. In 2017, there were 33 confirmed human West Nile Virus cases in the county and there has not been a death from the illness since 2015.

Anyone who becomes ill after exposure to mosquitoes should contact their health care provider. The Disease Control office can be reached at 951.358.5107 for more information on West Nile Virus.

For more about mosquito abatement, click www.rivcoeh.org/Programs/vector