

HEALTH OFFICIALS SEE INCREASED RISK OF MOSQUITO-BORNE ILLNESSES

Residents urged to take precautions to avoid mosquito bites

Area health officials are warning residents to take simple, common-sense precautions to avoid getting bit by mosquitoes this summer and fall. That's because of an increased risk of two different viruses that are spread through bites by infected mosquitoes – West Nile virus (WNV) and eastern equine encephalitis (EEE). These mosquito-borne illnesses can cause serious health problems. The good news is that there are a few easy steps that residents can take to avoid mosquito bites and “mosquito-proof” their homes throughout the rest of mosquito season.

Be aware of peak mosquito hours. The hours from dusk to dawn are peak biting times for many mosquitoes. Consider rescheduling outdoor activities that take place during evening or early morning hours. Otherwise, take extra care to use bug spray and protective clothing.

Clothing can help reduce mosquito bites. Although it may be difficult to do when it's hot, wearing long-sleeves, long pants and socks when outdoors will help keep mosquitoes away from your skin.

Apply bug spray when you go outdoors. Use a bug spray with **DEET** (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide), **permethrin**, **picaridin** (KBR 3023), **IR3535**, or **oil of lemon eucalyptus** [p-methane 3, 8-diol (PMD)] according to the instructions on the product label. DEET products should not be used on infants under two months of age and should be used in concentrations of 30% or less on older children. Oil of lemon eucalyptus should not be used on children under three years of age. Permethrin products are intended for use on items such as clothing, shoes, bed nets and camping gear and should not be applied to skin.

Drain standing water. Mosquitoes lay their eggs in standing water. Limit the number of places around your home for mosquitoes to breed by either draining or getting rid of items that hold water. Check rain gutters and drains. Empty any unused flowerpots and wading pools, and change water in birdbaths frequently.

Install or repair screens. Keep mosquitoes outside by having tightly-fitting screens on all of your windows and doors. Fix any holes or tears in screens, so mosquitoes can't get in.

Horse owners are encouraged to vaccinate their horses and reduce their horses' exposure to mosquitoes. Signs of illness in any horse should be evaluated by a veterinarian.

More information is available on the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) website at <http://www.mass.gov/dph/wnv>, or by calling the DPH Public Health Information Line at 1-866-MASS-WNV (1-866-627-7968).