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Public Health advisory issued for West Nile virus

Six human cases of West Nile virus, a mild flu-like disease spread by mosquitoes, have been reported by the Oregon State Public Health Laboratory. Department of Human Services officials are advising everyone to take precautions against mosquitoes in order to avoid the risk of infection.

“The risk of contracting West Nile virus is low but we do encourage people to take appropriate precautions to protect themselves against mosquito bites,” said Dr. Emilio DeBess, state public health veterinarian.

Current cases of West Nile virus appear to be concentrated along the Columbia River in Eastern Oregon and in Baker and Malheur counties. In addition to the human cases in Malheur, Umatilla and Morrow counties, tests by Oregon State University’s Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory has found West Nile virus in mosquitoes, birds and horses in those counties and in Baker County. Because a high number of mosquito pools testing positive in any area could lead to infection, DHS recommends people and animals be protected against mosquito bites.

Eighty percent of people infected with West Nile virus exhibit no symptoms. Of the remaining 20 percent most have very mild symptoms, such as fever, headaches and nausea lasting from three to six days. In a few cases, more severe symptoms occur including convulsions or disorientation. The central nervous system also may be affected resulting in febrile headache, aseptic meningitis or encephalitis.

Dr. DeBess says simple precautions can prevent the spread of West Nile virus. Eliminate sources of standing water that are a breeding ground for mosquitoes, including watering troughs, birdbaths, clogged gutters and old tires. Avoid outdoor activities at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active. Wear long-sleeved

shirts and long pants in mosquito-infested areas. Use mosquito repellents containing DEET, Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus or Picardin and follow the directions on the container. Make sure screen doors and windows are in good repair and fit tightly.

Additional information about West Nile virus is available on the Web from U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/ and Oregon Department of Human Services: <http://oregon.gov/DHS/ph/acd/diseases/w Nile/survey.shtml>