

UNVEILING THE TRUTH

A number of factors make West Nile virus disease unpredictable

By Jason Webb

For The Tribune

Two of the three mosquito-testing zones in Weld County have tested positive for West Nile virus, according to the Weld County Department of Public Health and Environment. This early detection does not necessarily mean that 2014 will reach the infection levels of 2003 when 408 cases of West Nile were reported.

Last year, the first human case was reported on July 3. In total, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment reported 320 total cases in the state — 89 of which were in Larimer County and 43 in Weld.

“The problem with West

Nile is the unpredictability,” said Dr. Jack Breen, an infectious diseases expert at North Colorado Medical Center. “It depends on the amount of infected mosquitoes, infected birds and standing water.”

Breen said that, even if a person is infected, he or she may not show signs of the infection. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention statistics show that about 20 percent of people infected will have some symptoms.

Symptoms for the mild form of West Nile include fever, headache, body aches, joint pain, vomiting, diarrhea, rash or fatigue. The fatigue and weakness can last for months, according to the CDC.

“Some people may show



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mends remembering dusk, dawn and DEET to help you stay safe from bites.

Dusk and dawn are when mosquitoes are most active, which is why experts recommend staying indoors or wearing clothes that cover more skin. DEET, an ingredient in some insect repellents, has been found to be effective in deterring mosquitoes when used as directed.

Other ingredients found in insect repellent that may be effective include picaridin, IR3535 and some oil of lemon eucalyptus and para-menthane-diol. Experts also recommend spraying a repellent containing permethrin over clothes can keep mosquitoes from biting through thinner materials, but it should never be applied directly to the skin.

Another suggestion is mosquito-proofing your home by ensuring all screens are in good shape and emptying all standing water around your house. Also, by using air conditioning, you can leave your windows shut and keep the mosquitoes outside.

“There is a myth that if you’re infected once you don’t have to worry about getting West Nile again,” Breen said. “That’s simply not true.”

Remember, it just takes a little precaution to keep you and your family safe.

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no signs at all,” Breen said. “However, a very small percentage, about 1 percent, of people infected will develop neurological symptoms.”

Those neurological symptoms include encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain, or meningitis, an inflammation of the protective layers of the brain and spinal cord. It can also include disori-

entation, coma, tremors, seizures or paralysis.

Severe cases of the virus may leave patients with permanent neurologic effects. The CDC also notes that roughly 10 percent of people with severe infections die. Of the 2,469 cases reported nationwide in 2013, the CDC states there were 119 deaths.

Blood tests are used to determine if someone is

infected with West Nile. If the blood test shows a positive infection, treatment is focused on relieving the symptoms.

“In severe, cases where a patient has lasting neurologic effects, rehab may be necessary,” Breen said.

There is no cure or vaccination for West Nile virus, so the best way to avoid it is to avoid mosquito bites. Breen recom-