

October 1, 2018

Eastern Equine Encephalitis detected in sentinel chicken

MOBILE, Alabama – A sentinel chicken used by the Mobile County Health Department (MCHD) to detect mosquito-borne diseases in the community has tested positive for Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE). The coop was in the 36582 ZIP Code.

EEE, which is a form of mosquito-borne encephalitis, has been confirmed by laboratory results, according to Dr. Bernard H. Eichold II, Health Officer for the Mobile County.

“There are no health benefits to being bitten by a mosquito,” Eichold said. “Don’t let your guard down. EEE has a human mortality rate of between 50 to 75 percent, while West Nile Virus is between 3 to 15 percent. EEE is a very serious mosquito-borne illness.”

The risk of encephalitis spread by mosquitoes is highest from August through the first freeze in the fall, Dr. Eichold said. MCHD’s Vector Control will step up control efforts in the surrounding area.

Blood is drawn from the sentinel chickens every Monday by Vector Control, and the samples are sent to a lab in Tampa, Florida. The results of the tests are available later in the week.

There were four EEE sentinel chicken cases reported in Mobile County during 2017, none in 2016 and one in 2015. In August 2018, the Alabama Department of Agriculture & Industries reported a horse in Mobile County had tested positive for EEE.

Health officials warn that it is extremely important that people taking part in outdoor activities make every effort to reduce their exposure to mosquitoes. Recommendations include:

- Use an Environmental Protection Agency-registered repellent with DEET.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Stay and sleep in places with air conditioning or window and door screens.
- Remove standing water around your home.

EEE is transmitted from bird to mosquito to bird. Mosquitoes can spread these viruses by feeding on the blood of infected birds and then biting another host animal or mammal such as a human or a horse.

Although humans and horses can become ill from the infection, the diseases cannot be spread from people or horses. The likelihood of transmission to humans and horses can be decreased by personal mosquito avoidance and the use of an EEE or West Nile Virus (WNV) vaccine in horses. There is no vaccine available for humans.

For approximately 25 years, Vector Control has monitored encephalitis in sentinel poultry flocks strategically placed in 13 coops throughout the county to detect the presence of viruses carried by mosquitoes. Mosquitoes also are trapped and tested for WNV, EEE and St. Louis Encephalitis.

To report an issue with mosquitoes, call Vector Services at 251-690-8124. To learn more, please visit <http://mchd.org> and under “Services” select “Vector Control.”

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