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MEDICAL ALERT FOR WEST NILE VIRUS LIFTED

TALLAHASSEE—The medical alert for West Nile (WN) virus and other mosquito-borne diseases that covered 39 different counties throughout the state has been lifted, Florida Department of Health (DOH) Secretary John O. Agwunobi, M.D., M.B.A., announced today. Even though the alert has been lifted, DOH, in conjunction with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC), Florida Mosquito Control Association, and state universities, will continue to work year-round to protect people and animals against mosquito-borne encephalitis.

“The medical alert has been lifted based upon a considerable drop in virus activity reported by our interagency surveillance program,” said Agwunobi. “Although we experienced an increase in human West Nile virus cases this year, people’s diligence in taking precautionary measures undoubtedly played a role in keeping this number much lower than the number of cases seen in other states.”

Agwunobi stressed that while the chance of people contracting West Nile (WN) virus, Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) virus or St. Louis Encephalitis (SLE) virus is reduced, people in areas with high concentrations of mosquitoes still need to take precautions, such as wearing mosquito repellent and eliminating stagnant water in birdbaths, ponds and other receptacles in which mosquitoes might breed.

Additionally, as this is the second year that WN virus has been found in the state, officials encourage anyone who discovers a dead bird to report it via the Internet. The bird mortality reporting system is located on the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission’s web site at: www.wildflorida.org/bird. If people do not have access to the Internet, they may report dead birds to their county health department or local FWCC office.

There were a total of 28 confirmed human WN virus encephalitis cases resulting in 2 deaths in Florida in 2002, compared to 12 cases with no deaths in 2001. Additionally, one human EEE and one human SLE case were reported to the Florida State Health Office during 2002. Nearly 450 dead birds were found with WN in Florida, along with over 1,000 sentinel chickens testing positive for the infection. FDACS reports nearly 500 horses in the state contracted WN and 20 horses were infected with EEE.

For more information on WN virus, visit the DOH Bureau of Epidemiology’s Web site at www.doh.state.fl.us (click on Epidemiology, then Health Topics), call the Bureau’s hotline at 1-888-880-5782 for recorded information, or call your local county health department.

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