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## NASSAU COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT LAUNCHES ITS ARBOVIRUS SENTINENTAL SURVEILLANCE PROJECT

The Florida Department of Health has reissued its prevention message for Florida's residents and visitors to protect themselves against mosquito-borne diseases. "While the chance of humans contracting a mosquito-borne disease is low, we still need to take precautions against mosquito bites," said Department of Health Secretary John O. Agwunobi, M.D., M.B.A. "As Florida moves into its warm season, these precautions will be key to limiting the spread of mosquito-borne diseases to humans."

Mosquito-borne infections, called arboviruses, such as Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE), and St. Louis Encephalitis (SLE), have long been native to Florida. West Nile Virus (WNV) has recently been introduced to Florida in the last two to three years. It is important to note, that WNV is now considered permanently established in the Florida mosquito and bird populations. Therefore, it is important for Florida residents and visitors to maintain an ongoing practice of mosquito protection to reduce potential exposure to all these diseases.

Mosquito-borne infections in people such as EEE, SLE, and WNV can cause mild or severe illness. Symptoms include: headache, fever, dizziness, confusion, movement disorders and coma.

The best defense against these arboviruses is prevention. Prevention measures include the "**Five D's**":

- **Dusk and Dawn** (avoid being outdoors when mosquitoes are seeking blood, for many species this is during dusk and dawn hours)
- **Dress** (wear clothing that covers skin)
- **DEET** (use mosquito repellents including DEET [N, N diethyl-*m*-toluamide] on skin or pyrethrins on clothing when you are outside)
- **Drainage** (check your home to rid it of standing water in which mosquitoes can lay their eggs).

Elimination of mosquito breeding sites is also critical to reducing numbers of mosquitoes in an area. The following are tips to reduce mosquito-breeding areas:

- Pump out bilges on boats.
- Replace water in birdbaths and pet or other animal feeding dishes at least once a week.
- Change water in plant trays, including hanging plants, at least once a week.

- Remove vegetation or obstructions in drainage ditches that prevent the flow of water.
- Clean out eaves, troughs and gutters.
- Remove old tires or drill holes in those used in playgrounds to drain.
- Turn over or remove empty plastic pots.
- Pick up all beverage containers and cups.
- Check tarps on boats or other equipment that may collect water.

Nassau County Health Department and community partners are launching an early detection program for the presence of arboviruses (EEE, SLE, WNV), in Nassau County. Arbovirus surveillance programs are used extensively throughout the country to provide early detection of mosquito-borne illnesses. This warning system is used to detect these viruses early, so the public can begin to initiate personal protection measures in order to reduce the possibility of mosquito-to-human transmission of illness.

Nassau County Health Department was awarded a Center for Disease Control (CDC) grant through the Florida Department of Health to conduct an arbovirus sentinel project. This project involves placing seven flocks of chickens at strategic locations throughout the county. These chickens will serve as sentinels, or early warning markers, for mosquito infection in the county. Sentinental chicken flocks are considered a sensitive and reliable tool for early detection of EEE, SLE, and WNV in a community.

This grant has brought together community partners. The Nassau County Commission has provided assistance in constructing equipment necessary for the sentinel chicken flocks. The Commission recruited Nassau County Volunteer Fire Departments to host the flocks. The four volunteer fire departments that were selected are:

- Bryceville station, at US 301;
- Callahan station, Ratliff Road;
- Yulee station, Miner Road;
- Nassau Oaks station, Griffin Road

Amelia Island Mosquito Control District office will host the seventh site, a flock located off Amelia Island Parkway, near the airport.

The Nassau County Health Department also recruited two other sites: a residential site north of Hilliard, on County Road 115-A, and a site on White Oak Plantation.

The criteria for selection of host sites for the flocks were based on two main factors: the necessity to place flocks geographically spaced throughout the county, and areas that were not affected by isolated community mosquito spraying.

The chicken flocks will be monitored weekly. Blood samples will be obtained from the flocks on a weekly basis. The samples will be tested for EEE, SLE, and WNV at the Department of Health Laboratory in Tampa, Florida. If test results are positive for any of these viruses, a press release will be issued by the Nassau County Health Department. This grant is approved for one year, pending future fundings.

For more information on the Arbovirus Surveillance Program call Wade Sparkman, Environmental Supervisor, with the Nassau County Health Department, Environmental Health Division at (904) 277-7284, or (904) 879-6606.

For more information about EEE, SLE and WNV, visit Department of Health's Bureau of Epidemiology's Web site at [http://doh.state.fl.us/disease\\_ctrl/epi/htopics/arbo/index.htm](http://doh.state.fl.us/disease_ctrl/epi/htopics/arbo/index.htm) or call the Bureau's hotline at 1-888-880-5782 for recorded information. Additionally, information on these arboviruses can be found at the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' website, <http://www.doacs.state.fl.us/ai.html>, or by calling (850) 410-0900. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission maintains a website for reporting wild bird die offs related to West Nile Virus. To report a suspected case, visit: <http://wld.fwc.state.fl.us/bird>.