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State of Louisiana News Desk 

Health Department Reminds Residents to Be Aware of West Nile Virus Threat, Take Precautions

BATON ROUGE, La.--Louisiana is experiencing its highest case rate of West Nile virus in several years, with 145 cases and nine deaths from the disease reported so far in 2012.

"Hurricane Isaac is the most obvious threat right now. In addition, everyone needs to be mindful that we are all still at risk of contracting West Nile Virus. This has been the most active West Nile Virus season Louisiana has experienced since 2006, so it's critical that everyone takes the necessary precautions, particularly as residents return to their homes and begin clean-up efforts," said DHH Secretary Bruce D. Greenstein.

Just last week, the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals held a press conference to remind people that they need to be aware of West Nile and realize that while this virus is a serious health threat, it's also preventable one.

"While Louisianans continue to focus on Hurricane Isaac, we still need to emphasize the importance of taking precautions to avoid West Nile virus, and we are urging everyone to remain vigilant," Greenstein said.

Residents are encouraged to take daily precautions to avoid mosquito bites, including:

- Use repellents containing DEET when outdoors.
- Cover bare skin with long sleeves and pants.
- Stay indoors and use screens at night.
- Remove standing water where mosquitoes can breed.
- Apply mosquito repellent to clothing and skin.

The DHH is also encouraging West Nile virus surveillance to continue because the virus can persist for many years in the local mosquito population.

"We're seeing a high number of local mosquito surveillance positive tests, so we need to remain watchful in order to control the spread of West Nile virus," Greenstein said.

Residents in affected parishes were advised to consider taking these additional steps to protect themselves from mosquito bites:

- Use indoor lighting that produces artificial light instead of heat, such as cool-white fluorescent and certain LED bulbs.
- Use curtains or blinds to keep mosquitoes from entering inside.
- Use fans to create a breeze and reduce mosquito entry.
- Check plastic sheeting around windows and doors for tears or holes.
- Use screens on windows and doors.
- Check window screens and repair or replace them if necessary.
- Change water in bird baths and other containers of water that collect standing water.
- Avoid areas with stagnant water.