

TIMELY INFORMATION

Agriculture & Natural Resources

Protecting Yourself from Mosquito-Borne Illnesses



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Eastern equine encephalitis and West Nile virus both have claimed victims in Alabama in the last decade. While West Nile virus is more common, EEE is a much more serious disease. Mosquitoes are the primary carriers for EEE and WNV

According to Dr. Joan Colfer, executive director of the Collier County Health Department in FL, the breed of mosquito that transmits equine encephalitis lives in swamps and the breed that transmits West Nile virus thrives in floodwater and ditches after heavy rainfall. In contrast, the mosquito that transmits dengue fever prefers to live in porches and inside homes. They can breed in a cap of water and need only a very small amount of water to breed.

People can reduce their risk of contracting a mosquito-borne illness by taking some simple steps to reduce mosquito-breeding sites. It is vital that, at this peak mosquito season, everyone takes appropriate measures to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes. Homeowners should eliminate potential sources of stagnant water in which mosquitoes might breed.

Dispose of any water-holding containers, including discarded tires and soft drink cans. Store containers, such as buckets, in garages or barns, if you must leave them outside, turn them over so that they do not collect rainwater. Turn over plastic wading pools or wheelbarrows when not in use.

Additional tips include:

- Do not allow water to stagnate in birdbaths.
- Drain outside standing water.
- Aerate ornamental pools or stock them with fish that will eat mosquito larvae
- Use floating Bt briquettes to control mosquito larvae. One briquette lasts about 30 days and treats 100 square feet of surface water. They are available in pet stores or stores that sell pond supplies.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools that are not in use.
- Make sure windows and doors have screens that are in good repair.

Keeping vegetation trimmed low can eliminate resting sites for mosquitoes in the daytime.

Residents should minimize time spent outdoors between dusk and dawn. For those who enjoy outdoor activities should take precautions to reduce the risk of being bitten by mosquitoes by employing personal and household protection measures. Wear shoes, socks, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt when outdoors for long periods or when mosquitoes are most active. You may want to use an EPA-registered mosquito repellent such as those with DEET, picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus, applied according to label directions, when you are outdoors.