



MARICOPA COUNTY
Environmental Services
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COUNTY ASKS CITIZENS FOR HELP CONTROLLING BREEDING OF MOSQUITOES ***“Sentinel” Chickens Test Positive for Encephalitis Viruses***

(Phoenix)—The Maricopa County Environmental Services Department (MCESD) announced that five “sentinel” chickens tested positive this week for encephalitis viruses and are asking Valley citizens for their help in controlling the breeding of mosquitoes.

“Though the risk for mosquito-borne diseases is small at this point, people should do what they can to eliminate breeding conditions around their home and protect themselves from being bitten,” said John Townsend, manager of MCESD’s Vector Control program.

Backyard containers that can collect water can be significant sources of mosquitoes. Vector Control officials stress the importance of removing or covering these containers and following these guidelines to minimize the risk of mosquito-borne illnesses:

- Eliminate standing water, where mosquitoes breed. Check for items outside the home that collect water, such as cans, bottles, buckets, old tires, drums and other containers.
- Keep decorative fountains operational or drain the water. Check fountains after rain and at least twice a week.
- Change water in flower vases, birdbaths, planters and animal watering dishes at least twice a week.
- Repair leaky pipes and outside faucets, and move air conditioner drain hoses frequently.
- Avoid bites, especially at night, by using insect repellent and by wearing lightweight clothing that covers arms and legs.

In May, County and State health officials set up sentinel chicken flocks in Queen Creek, Laveen and Peoria to serve as an early warning tool to test for viruses that can cause encephalitis in humans and other mammals. Vector Control collects blood twice a month and checks for antibodies, which are produced when the chickens have been infected by a virus-carrying mosquito. The blood samples are tested for three mosquito-borne viruses: St. Louis encephalitis (SLE), western equine encephalitis (WEE) and West Nile virus (WNV).

The first positive tests of the season were found at all three sites -- two for SLE (one in Laveen, one in Peoria) and three for WEE (one in Laveen, Peoria and Queen Creek).

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“Finding positive tests across such a widespread geographical area indicate that the potential for virus activity is high throughout the whole county. People should be taking precautions Valley-wide,” said Townsend.

SLE and WEE are transmitted to humans through bites from infected *Culex* mosquitoes, which bite after dark. The mosquitoes pick up the viruses from the blood of infected birds. Encephalitis viruses from mosquitoes can cause inflammation of the brain and other parts of the central nervous system. Symptoms may include fever, headache, stiff neck, lethargy, disorientation, muscle tremors or weakness and coma. WEE can also cause sickness in horses.

Recently the discovery of a new mosquito species in Tempe has County and State health officials concerned. The *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, which has previously been found only in southern Arizona, other southern states and Mexico, has shown up in a Tempe neighborhood. This mosquito can transmit diseases such as dengue and yellow fever. County Vector Control is working with the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) and the City of Tempe to educate local residents on how to reduce breeding.

For more information about mosquito-borne diseases, go to the MCESD web site at www.maricopa.gov/envsvc or call (602) 506-0700. To file a mosquito complaint, call (602) 506-6616.

About the Vector Control Program

The Vector Control office is part of the Water and Waste Management Division of the Environmental Services Department. Vector Control staff investigates citizen complaints dealing with mosquitoes, flies and non-native rodents, and enforces the Maricopa County Environmental Health Code. The Vector Control office also provides mosquito-eating fish, called *Gambusia*, free to the public, for use in ponds, stock tanks, or any permanent waters a homeowner may have.