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NEWS RELEASE

Mosquitoes in El Paso Test Positive for St. Louis Encephalitis Public health officials stress awareness, mosquito bite prevention

EL PASO, Texas – Today, the City of El Paso Department of Public Health announced that a mosquito pool has tested positive for the St. Louis encephalitis virus (SLEV). The disease is spread to people by the bite of an infected mosquito but has not been detected in a human in the El Paso area since 1982. The mosquitoes that tested positive in this study came from the Mission Valley area. Mosquitoes carrying the SLEV were last detected in El Paso in 2017.

Most people infected with SLEV have no apparent illness. Initial symptoms of those who become ill include fever, headache, nausea, vomiting, and tiredness. Severe neuroinvasive disease (often involving encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain) occurs more commonly in older adults. In rare cases, long-term disability or death can result.

"This disease is very similar to West Nile virus which we are all too familiar with in the border region," said Fernando Gonzalez, Lead Epidemiologist. "We need our community to be informed about the disease and for the medical community to begin testing for this disease, if indicated, so that we can determine if it is being spread locally."

There are no vaccines to prevent nor medications to treat SLEV, and care is based on symptoms. You can reduce your risk of being infected with SLEV by practicing the same mosquito bite prevention that has been stressed by public health officials in order to prevent other diseases such as West Nile virus.

- DEET - Use insect repellents that contain DEET when outdoors.
- DRESS - Wear long sleeves, long pants, and socks when outdoors.
- DUSK and DAWN – Although mosquitoes associated with other diseases such as Zika can be active throughout the day; residents should take extra care during peak mosquito biting hours (from dusk to dawn) or consider avoiding outdoor activities during these times.
- DRAIN – Drain standing water from flowerpots, gutters, buckets, pool covers, pet water dishes, and birdbaths.

At this time, there have been no confirmed cases of STLEV in El Paso, but there are five confirmed cases of West Nile so far this season.

For more information on the Public Health Department, call 2-1-1 or visit www.EPHealth.com or www.EPSalud.com.

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