

Contact: Ernie Edmundson

or Nancy Freeman

361 790-0103

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**CONTROL MOSQUITOES TO CONTROL WEST NILE VIRUS**

By Ginger Easton Smith

**Aransas County has not had any confirmed cases of West Nile Virus, but are you aware that nearby Nueces County has had four cases, including, sadly, one death? There have been 1,013 confirmed cases of the disease in Texas this year alone,** 40 of them resulting in deaths**, according to the Texas Department of State Health Service.**

**West Nile Virus (WNV) is spread by some, but not all, species of mosquitoes and infects people, birds, and horses. This happens only when one of these mosquitoes bites an infected bird and then bites a human. The virus cannot be spread by a previously disease-free mosquito biting an infected person or horse and then biting a disease free person. The mosquito has to get the virus from an infected bird.** Although WNV is not preventable in humans with a vaccine, there is a vaccine for horses.  Horse owners may want to contact their veterinarian for advice on whether their horses should be vaccinated.

The easiest and best way to avoid WNV is to prevent mosquito bites, but how do you accomplish that? Your best defense is to practice these habits, known as the “Four Ds”, which you may have heard of, but bear repeating:

1. **Dress** in long sleeves and long pants when you are outside.
2. Stay indoors at **dusk and dawn**, when mosquitoes are most active.
3. **Drain** standing water where mosquitoes breed. Common breeding sites include old tires, flowerpots and clogged rain gutters.
4. Use insect repellent containing **DEET**, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus (or PMD), or IR3535, whenever you go outdoors. Always follow the product label closely.

To select an insect repellent, read the labels of several and chose the one you prefer. DEET and picaridin are characterized by the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), the agency that registers pesticides, as ‘conventional repellents’; the others are ‘biopesticide repellents’, meaning they are derived from natural materials. For more information on repellent active ingredients see <http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/health/mosquitoes/ai_insectrp.htm>.

It typically takes mosquitoes 10-14 days to complete their life cycle from egg to adult. They lay their eggs in a puddle or a pond of standing water. It doesn’t have to be much water at all, and doesn’t have to be clean. As a matter of fact, water becomes more attractive to mosquitoes after it’s been sitting for several days, especially if it has been “improved” by a little soil or some plant material; it just has to be standing for about 10 days.

To reduce the mosquito population around your house, work, or play area, AgriLife Extension-Aransas County recommends the following:

Look for standing water in and around your yard, go outside and look thoroughly. Check overflow dishes under potted plants, wheelbarrows, buckets, children’s toys and neglected bird baths. Also, take a look at drainage ditches and gutters next to your home. Not as obvious are areas where water puddles in the lawn or compost pile. It only takes a little soil, compost or a few leaves, and water that stands for 1-2 weeks, for mosquitoes to have a breeding spot.

Drain or treat standing water. Empty out all those containers, even if they only hold a little water. Get rid of mosquito breeding sites by emptying standing water from flower pots, buckets and barrels. If you have plants that hold water such as bromeliads, squirt out the old water at least once a week. Change the water in pet dishes and replace the water in bird baths weekly. Drill holes in tire swings so water drains out. Empty (onto soil) children's wading pools when they won’t be used for several days and turn them on their sides. Mow your lawn frequently, and give the compost pile a few extra turns.

If the water can’t be emptied out, such as water in catchment basins, treat it with mosquito dunks. Mosquito dunks are given out free by the County Environmental Health Department. County residents can pick up four dunks each month. Fishponds don’t usually need to be treated because the fish will eat the “wigglers”.

Cut back on the frequency of irrigation. Let the soil surface dry out between watering’s. Don’t turn the water on until the soil is dry an inch below the surface (poke a finger in the soil to check). Surprisingly, a frequently watered lawn can hold enough mini-puddles for mosquitoes to either breed or at least to hang out and rest.

Trim bushes back from buildings and up from the ground to reduce hiding places for mosquitoes and increase air flow. Clean out rain gutters, so water can flow rather than collecting (because it will rain again, I’m told), and adjust downspouts for proper drainage.

To see videos and more detailed print from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, go to [www.citybugs.tamu.edu](http://www.citybugs.tamu.edu). Also visit Texas DSHS at [http://txwestnile.org](http://txwestnile.org/). It will take several practices to reduce the population of mosquitoes and incidence of being bitten, but practicing the “Four Ds” will make a difference.

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*Texas AgriLife Extension Service - Aransas County Office can be reached by phone at 361-790-0103 or by email at* [*aransas-tx@tamu.edu*](mailto:aransas-tx@tamu.edu) *and is located at 892 Airport Road, Rockport. AgriLife Extension education programs serve people of all ages, regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, handicap or national origin.*