

Experts list precautions for West Nile

With the year's first human case of the West Nile virus discovered earlier this month, the time to take precautions against the potentially fatal disease has now arrived. The Mississippi State Department of Health reported the discovery of the first human case of the year in Copiah County. There have been no reports of infected birds, animals or people in Alcorn County to date this year.

The virus, which is transmitted by mosquitoes and can cause a reaction ranging from mild flu-like symptoms to a potentially deadly swelling of the brain, can best be prevented by avoiding exposure to its insect carriers.

Experts urge home and land owners to reduce the mosquito population by destroying potential breeding grounds. The insects lay their eggs in areas of standing water. "It's always a good idea to limit mosquito breeding grounds," said Mississippi State University Extension Service Alcorn County Director Patrick Poindexter. "Any type of standing water can be a potential site for mosquito breeding grounds"

He said the absolute best way to reduce the number of mosquitoes is to get rid of standing water. He noted that mosquitoes can breed in as small an area as the water standing in the fork of a tree. People should empty buckets and containers holding water and should be wary of low lying, marshy areas which provide a perfect location for mosquitoes to breed.

Poindexter said those who have areas of standing water which cannot be removed, such as water gardens, should consider the purchase of a product known as "Mosquito dunk". These thin wafer like items are placed in the water and kill the mosquito larvae before it can grow into a full sized insect. Users should read the label directions and be sure the product is safe for any animals that may use the water in question, such as fish in a garden pond.

It's also a good idea to avoid being bitten. Poindexter said its best to avoid areas known to contain mosquitoes, but if its necessary to be around the insects some simple precautions can help reduce the risk. He recommends using an insect repellent containing the chemical DEET. People should also wear long sleeves and long pants in those areas.