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Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FIRST HUMAN CASE OF WEST NILE VIRUS IN SHELBY COUNTY

SHELBY COUNTY, TN – The Shelby County Health Department (SCHD), along with the Tennessee Department of Health, reports the first human case of West Nile Virus (WNV) in Shelby County in 2019. The reported case is also the first human case of the virus in the state of Tennessee.

West Nile Virus is the leading cause of mosquito borne disease in the continental United States. The disease is, typically, spread to humans through a bite from an infected mosquito. Once infected, persons with West Nile Virus can experience signs and symptoms that range from mild flu-like illness to severe illness resulting from inflammation in the brain and spinal cord, which can be fatal. Amongst four human cases of WNV reported in Shelby County during 2018, there were three fatalities.

Shelby County Health Department Director Alisa Haushalter urges everyone who lives and works in Shelby County to protect themselves against mosquito bites and to take measures to reduce the number of mosquitos in Shelby County. “Persons over age 50 and those with compromised immune systems are at higher risk of developing severe illness if infected with WNV. Preventing mosquito bites is the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones.”

The Health Department recommends the following precautions to prevent mosquito bites:

- Wear long pants and long-sleeve shirts when working or playing outside, especially in the early morning and evening hours when mosquitoes are most active.
- Wear mosquito repellants containing DEET, according to label directions.
- Install or repair screens on windows and doors.

Shelby County residents are valuable partners with public health in the fight against mosquitoes. Eliminating mosquito-breeding sites around homes and businesses is crucial to controlling our mosquito problem. Any object that collects rainwater is a potential breeding ground for mosquitoes.

The Health Department encourages all residents to take the following measures to control mosquito populations around their homes and businesses:

- Clean rain gutters and downspouts

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- Discard old tires or store inside where rain water cannot collect inside of tires
- Discard tin cans, buckets – any container that might collect water
- Empty and refill pets' water bowls at least every few days
- Empty, clean and refill birdbaths, “drip plates” underneath flower pots and small wading pools weekly.

Throughout mosquito season, Shelby County Health Department's Mosquito Control program traps mosquitoes in each zip code in the county and sends them for laboratory testing. So far this year, mosquito pools positive for the West Nile Virus have been detected in the following zip codes: 38002, 38016, 38053, 38104, 38106, 38108, 38109, 38111, 38112, 38114, 38115, 38116, 38117, 38118, 38119, 38122, 38127, 38128, 38133, 38135. The virus is expected to become widespread in mosquitoes throughout the county by the fall.

The Mosquito Control Program is conducting truck-mounted sprayings of EPA-approved insecticides, weather permitting, in specific ZIP code where WNV has been confirmed in mosquitoes. Information about the scheduled sprayings, including maps of the spray areas, is posted weekly on the Shelby County Health Department website: <http://www.shelbytnhealth.com/>.

Additionally, the Mosquito Control Program has stepped up efforts to control mosquito breeding in the affected zip codes by treating mosquito-breeding sites with EPA-approved insecticides. Reducing mosquito breeding is the most effective way of controlling mosquito populations.

For more information about the Shelby County Health Department's Mosquito Control Program, visit our website: <http://www.shelbytnhealth.com/>.

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