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Press Release

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West Nile Virus Contributes to Two Idaho Deaths

West Nile virus may have contributed to the recent deaths of two Idaho residents, a Gem County man and a Bingham County woman. This is the first West Nile related death in Gem County and the second death in Bingham County. Both residents were over the age of 70. As of today, 12 Idaho residents are confirmed to have died from illnesses associated with West Nile virus in 2006. All of the resident deaths were in people over the age of 60.

“We are very sad that another person has died,” says Dr. Christine Hahn, State Epidemiologist. “Mosquito season is not over yet in many areas of our state, so people still need to take precautions. If mosquitoes are active, we urge people to cover up exposed skin or apply mosquito repellent.”

West Nile virus has infected 760 Idaho residents this year. Symptoms of West Nile infection include headaches, body aches, fever and sometimes a rash. People are advised to call their healthcare provider if symptoms interfere with their daily routine, or are symptoms they would normally call their doctor about.

West Nile virus is spread by the bite of infected mosquitoes; it does not spread by person-to-person contact or from animals to people. Because mosquitoes are the main form of transmission, people are advised to ‘Fight the Bite’ of mosquitoes and:

- Insect-proof their homes by repairing or replacing screens;
- Reduce standing water on their property that provides mosquito breeding habitat, such as bird baths and decorative ponds;

(more)

- Cover up exposed skin when outdoors;
- Apply insect repellent approved by the EPA to exposed skin and clothing. Follow instructions on the product label, especially for children;
- Avoid mosquitoes when they are most active at dawn and dusk; and
- Report dead birds and squirrels to your local Fish and Game office.

West Nile virus does not appear to affect most animals including dogs and cats, but can cause severe illness in horses and certain species of birds. Although there is not a vaccine available for people, there are several vaccines for horses. Approximately one-third of horses which contract West Nile virus will die, so horse owners are encouraged to vaccinate their animals. Horse owners who suspect West Nile viral infection in their animal should contact their veterinarian immediately.

Additional information about the virus is available from the Department of Health and Welfare's web site at <http://www.westnile.idaho.gov>, which is updated every afternoon. The Idaho State Department of Agriculture's Urban Pest Management program also has information available on steps to prevent home-grown mosquito infestations. This information is available on ISDA's web site at <http://www.idahoag.us>.

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(Editors: For more information, please contact IDHW Public Information Officer Tom Shanahan at 334-0668, or your District Health Department Public Information Officer.)