

August 30, 2005

West Nile Virus deaths reported in Toronto

Dr. David McKeown, Toronto's Medical Officer of Health, is reporting two deaths this past weekend resulting from West Nile Virus infection.

A 63-year-old male resident of Scarborough died on Friday and a 90 year-old male resident of Etobicoke died Saturday. The cause of death in both cases was confirmed today. There are now 15 human cases of West Nile Virus reported in Toronto.

"These deaths are an unfortunate reminder that West Nile Virus can be a serious health threat, although death is extremely rare," said Dr. McKeown.

There were six human cases of West Nile Virus with no deaths in Toronto last year and in 2003 there were 44 human cases with no deaths. In 2002, the first year West Nile Virus was detected in Toronto, there were 10 deaths and 166 cases, although the data for that year are incomplete.

"We are now at the peak of West Nile Virus season and everyone should take precautions to avoid mosquito bites," said Dr. McKeown.

Residents are reminded to:

- take precautions in the early morning and evening, when mosquitoes are most active
- wear light coloured clothing, long sleeve shirts, long pants and socks
- use repellent containing DEET when outdoors in areas with mosquitoes
- repair any holes in door and window screens
- eliminate mosquito breeding sites around the home

About 20 per cent of people who are bitten by a mosquito infected with West Nile Virus will experience mild, flu-like symptoms such as fever, headaches and body aches that may be accompanied by skin rash and swollen glands.

Less than one per cent of those infected become seriously ill with symptoms that include stiff neck, confusion, severe headache and sudden sensitivity to light. Anyone suffering swelling or infection from a mosquito bite should seek medical attention. Those over the age of 55 and people with compromised immune systems are at higher risk.

For more information visit the Web site at www.toronto.ca/health or call 416-338-7600.

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