

Think Twice

With West Nile appearing, protection is critical in a climate where mosquitoes rein

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By JEFFREY C. STIVERS, Special to the Daily News

On July 31, the announcement that Collier County had one of the first human cases of West Nile virus in the state reinforced the unpredictable nature of mosquitoes and mosquito control. This case was a surprise to the Collier Mosquito Control District and the Collier County Health Department for two reasons.

First, the infected individual was from Marco Island, an area infested primarily with salt marsh mosquitoes. West Nile virus is carried by *Culex nigripalpus*, a fresh water mosquito not commonly found in large numbers on Marco Island. While Marco Island frequently has high numbers of mosquitoes, they are almost all salt marsh mosquitoes, which are not believed to transmit West Nile virus; therefore no one expected the first human case in Collier to come from Marco.



In addition, mosquito counts over the entire Collier Mosquito Control District area were extremely low, with many areas registering no mosquitoes at all. One would think that with so few mosquitoes the risk of someone becoming infected was almost zero. Well, "almost zero" translated to someone becoming infected with West Nile virus.

For a week after the announcement of the West Nile virus case on Marco, the media was full of sound bites (including mine) urging local residents to take precautions against being bitten by mosquitoes. With the high school football season starting and lots of people out in the evening sitting under lights it concerns me what could happen.

About 10 days after the announcement it hit home to me just how much thought has to go into following those protective measures.

Sunday, for me, started like any other day during the rainy season. Get up early and try to get some of the outdoor items on the honey-do list done before the rains. Dress for the

day was the regular — gym shorts, ratty T-shirt and sandals. While working outside that morning, I nonchalantly swatted several mosquitoes that had come for dinner. After all, a few mosquitoes aren't enough to even think about for someone used to hundreds of hungry mosquitoes biting them, right?

Wrong! Enlightenment finally hit with a resounding "Duh, Stivers" and I realized that I was doing exactly what I had spent the last week telling others not to do. I was outside, exposed to mosquitoes potentially infected with the West Nile virus, totally unprotected.

A liberal application of repellent with DEET soon corrected that problem. Still, I had exposed myself to mosquitoes that could have infected me with West Nile virus simply because I did not THINK before I went outside.

Residents of the county need to do what I failed to do. Think about the risk before going outdoors and then take the necessary precautions. Follow the five D's:

- Avoid being outdoors, especially at Dusk and Dawn when mosquitoes are most active.
- Dress appropriately when outdoors. Light colored clothing with long sleeves and long pants, shoes and socks are the best.
- Use a repellent containing DEET. Concentrations of DEET under 30 percent are recommended; those provide approximately six hours of protection.
- Drain standing water in bird baths, cans, bottles, tires, rain gutters and anything else that can hold water and breed mosquitoes.

Those are the five official D's, but there are two more unofficial ones. As my Mother used to tell me, "Do as I say, not as I Do." Follow the first five D's to protect yourself from mosquitoes and West Nile better than I did.



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