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Allegan County Health Department Continues to Promote Protective Actions in the Wake of Vector-Borne Diseases Emerging in the State

(Allegan, MI)— Socially distanced outdoor activities are just one of many ways to keep our community healthier during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Allegan County Health Department (ACHD) continues to encourage residents to take actions in preventing vector-borne illness or diseases caused by ticks and mosquitoes when exploring the outdoors. Mosquitoes and ticks pose a health-risk to humans until the first hard frost of the season.

As of August 31, there have been two human cases of Jamestown Canyon Virus, 10 cases of Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) in 10 horses and two confirmed avian cases of West Nile Virus (WNV) confirmed in Michigan. Last year, Michigan experienced 32 cases of WNV (12 residents and 20 animals) and 60 cases of EEE (10 residents and 50 animals), with Allegan County having three of the EEE animal cases. This season, there have been no confirmed cases of any mosquito or tick borne illnesses in Allegan County to date.

Prevention is the best way to protect yourself and your family.

Tick bites can be prevented by:

• Avoiding tick-infested areas and clearing high grass, brush, and leaf litter around your home.
• Using DEET containing insect repellents (Do not use on children under 2 months of age).
• Wearing light colored, long-sleeved shirts, long-legged pants and closed toe shoes.
• Performing daily tick checks.
• Checking pets for ticks when they have been outside.
• Putting your clothes in the dryer on high heat for 60 minutes to kill any remaining ticks.

Mosquito bites can be prevented by:

• Using insect repellents. For children, apply products with less than 30 percent DEET.
• Wearing long-sleeved shirts, long-legged pants and spraying clothes with repellent containing permethrin.

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• Emptying standing water from around your home on a regular basis. Standing water can be found in flowerpots, gutters, buckets, pool covers, pet water dishes, discarded tires, and birdbaths.
• Installing or repairing screens on windows and doors to keep mosquitoes outside. Use air conditioning if possible.

Symptoms of arbovirus infection like EEE and WNV typically include a high fever, confusion, muscle weakness and a severe headache. More serious complications include neurological illnesses, such as meningitis and encephalitis.

Horse owners are strongly advised to vaccinate their animals against arboviruses. Please contact your veterinarian about this option and take other precautions to safeguard your animals.

To combat the spread of this disease, owners of horses can:
• House their horses in a barn under fans (as mosquitoes are not strong flyers) during peak mosquito activity from dusk to dawn.
• Use an insect repellant on the animals that is approved for the species.
• Eliminate standing water on the property including, fill in puddles, repair eaves, and change the water in buckets and bowls at least once a day.
• Contact a veterinarian if a horse shows signs of the illness: mild fever, lack of appetite, lethargy, weakness, stumbling, tremors, and a droopy lip and/or head tilt.

For more information on these and other diseases that may affect humans or animals, visit www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases. To learn how to remove and submit a tick for identification, call ACHD at (269) 673-5415.

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