

**NEW YORK**  
state department of  
**HEALTH**

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Nirav R. Shah, M.D., M.P.H.  
Commissioner

Sue Kelly  
Executive Deputy Commissioner

September 21, 2011

Hon. Patty Ritchie  
Member of the Senate  
State of New York  
46 East Bridge Street, First Floor  
Oswego, New York 13126

Dear Senator Ritchie:

I am writing in response to your August 15 and August 31, 2011, letters to New York State Commissioner of Health, Nirav R. Shah, M.D., M.P.H., regarding Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) virus. Five human cases have been reported in the State: one each in 1971, 1983, 2009, 2010 and 2011. Unfortunately, all were fatal and occurred among individuals from Central New York. In addition to this year's human case, counties from the region have reported the presence of EEE among nine horses (Oswego 6, Oneida 2, St. Lawrence 1), two dogs (Oswego) and 31 mosquito pools (Oswego 23, Onondaga 6, Oneida 2). While the current mosquito season has not yet concluded, in the last several years, seven horses and 41 mosquito pools are reported on average; the finding of EEE in dogs is rare.

The New York State Department of Health (Department) has a multi-faceted program to study, understand and control EEE virus, which I will be pleased to discuss during the upcoming public roundtable that you have convened in Oswego County later next month. These activities are performed in partnership with the local health departments of Onondaga, Oneida, Madison and Oswego counties, which comprise the current geographic center of this disease in New York. These local health departments are eligible to receive between 36%-50% reimbursement of eligible costs under Article 6 of the New York State Public Health Law. The following are summaries of the Department's activities in this area:

- **Mosquito surveillance:** Working with the four county health departments, starting in early summer, the Department coordinates the weekly collection and identification of mosquitoes from 45 traps located in key habitats for EEE in the region.
- **Mosquito testing:** The Department's Wadsworth Laboratory tests these mosquitoes for EEE virus on a weekly basis. The information on EEE infection in the subpopulations of mammal-biting species of mosquitoes is key information in monitoring the EEE virus each season.
- **Equine surveillance.** The Department and the four counties maintain surveillance of veterinarians for encephalitis in horses. Horses are very sensitive to EEE and infection is often fatal. Suspect cases are tested at the Department's Wadsworth Laboratory to confirm the infection.

- **Human surveillance.** Encephalitis is a reportable condition in New York. Each summer, the Department sends alerts to physicians to be aware of the symptoms of EEE, West Nile Virus and other forms of infectious encephalitis. Suspect cases are tested at the Department's Wadsworth Laboratory for a host of potential causes.
- **Public education:** Department staff has developed more than a dozen different educational brochures, available in several languages. The Department issues press releases and health advisories multiple times during the mosquito season. Specific information includes personal protective measures for the public and technical and diagnostic information for providers.

Additionally, the Department provides technical assistance and consultation to local health departments regarding control measures including adulticiding (spraying), which aims to reduce the risk of EEE virus transmission to humans by decreasing mosquito populations through the appropriate use of pesticides. The decision to undertake adult mosquito control measures is ultimately a local decision, which takes into consideration a variety of factors including:

- the most recent human, horse and mosquito surveillance data;
- the numbers and species of positive mosquito populations (some species are more likely to bite humans, others more likely to bite birds);
- the density and proximity of human populations to positive mosquitoes;
- the time of year that positive results are found relative to historical trends;
- forecasted weather conditions and the impact they could have on the mosquito population and the feasibility of spraying;
- the geography of and accessibility to the area where mosquitoes are located;
- whether the current positive results are geographically focal or widespread; and
- the potential harmful impact that adulticides may have on humans, other insect species, and the environment.

Historically, Oswego County has decided to spray at some point in each of the last several seasons. While the Department supported these decisions, it is important to understand that spraying adulticide has uncertain and potentially, very limited benefits for preventing EEE among humans. Spraying is only feasible in relatively limited geographic areas due to cost, the location of mosquitoes, and accessibility for spraying by planes. Spraying also has a time limited benefit because it does not kill all mosquitoes in the area and those that are killed can rapidly be replaced by new mosquitoes. Mosquitoes obtain the EEE virus from infected birds so the virus is ultimately not fully eliminated—these new mosquitoes can possibly become infected.

The Department is not aware of any plans by St. Lawrence County to initiate such measures. Prior to the diagnosis of the horse from St. Lawrence County, the Department redirected existing staff and resources to enhance EEE surveillance in the region.

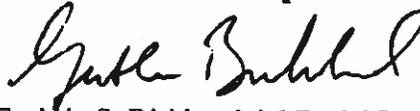
Given the limitations of spraying, the primary strategy to prevent EEE infection among humans must continue to be the promotion of personal preventive measures. The Department recently updated its educational campaigns and fact sheets regarding mosquito borne diseases and their prevention and control. Additionally, to reach residents in the region, tens of thousands of these materials and 100,000 DEET wipes were distributed at the New York State Fair.

At the end of this year's season, the Department will be updating its mosquito-borne diseases response and control plan for the 2012 season. A special emphasis will be placed on the control and prevention of EEE in the Central New York Region. Goals include developing risk

communication and prevention activities (using both personal protective measures and environmental controls) and to develop an enhanced testing and surveillance program for each county.

Should you have further questions or concerns, please contact Mr. James Clancy, Assistant Commissioner, Office of Governmental and External Affairs, at (518) 473-1124.

Sincerely,



Guthrie S. Birkhead, M.D., M.P.H.  
Deputy Commissioner  
Office of Public Health

cc: Hon. Aubertine, Commissioner, NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets  
Hon. Martens, Commissioner, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation  
Senate Health Committee Chair Mr. Hannon  
Senate Finance Committee Chair Mr. DeFrancisco  
Senate President Pro Temp and Majority Leader Mr. Skelos  
Dr. Norfleet, Director, Oswego County Health Department  
Mr. Clancy, Assistant Commissioner, Office of Governmental and External Affairs  
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