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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **West Nile Virus case confirmed in Oklahoma County**

The first West Nile Virus case of 2007 has been confirmed in Oklahoma County. Health officials encourage everyone to take precautions when outside during times when mosquitoes are most active, during the early morning hours and evening.

The virus, which can cause encephalitis, was first detected in the United States in New York in 1999 and has now been found in 43 states and the District of Columbia, according to Centers for Disease Control. Last year, Oklahoma County had 18 confirmed cases of West Nile, with one death. The state of Oklahoma reported 48 human cases of WNV for 2006, with 6 deaths. Fifty-four cases of human infection with WNV have been reported nationwide this year.

Encephalitis is an inflammation of the brain. For the past six years since West Nile virus (WNV) first appeared in Oklahoma, activity of the virus in Oklahoma County has been relatively low, but with the wet weather that Oklahoma has been experiencing, the risk of infection is once again present, and public health officials encourage individuals to take steps to protect themselves from this potentially serious disease.

It is believed that fewer than 1 percent of mosquitoes in areas where the virus has been found actually carry the virus, and fewer than 1 percent of the bites from infected mosquitoes cause illness. The best way to reduce the risk of West Nile encephalitis and other mosquito-borne illnesses is to reduce the chances of mosquito bites.

People should remove standing water from around their houses, wear an insect repellent containing DEET when outdoors in mosquito-infested areas and make sure windows and doors are properly screened.

The Oklahoma City-County Health Department will again be obtaining larvicide to distribute to Oklahoma County municipalities. The larvicide, which prevents the development of mosquito larvae into adults, will be placed in public areas with standing water.

While the larvicide will not be available to the general public, there are a number of precautions that people can take to reduce their risk of being infected. These precautions can include limiting outdoor activity at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active,

making sure that screens over windows and doors are in good condition, wearing long pants and long-sleeved shirts for outdoor activity when possible, and using an insect repellent containing DEET on skin and clothing. People should also be aware of the symptoms of West Nile Encephalitis, including headache, high fever, stiff neck and muscle weakness, and consult a doctor if they experience these symptoms.

The public is encouraged to be aware of sources of standing water around their homes. Even very small pools of standing water can be used by mosquitoes to lay their eggs. Swimming pools and children's wading pools should be covered when not in use. Boats should be stored either covered or turned upside down when possible. Items that can collect rainwater, such as old tires and buckets, should be either covered or discarded, and bird baths and pet water bowls should be cleaned out daily.

Concerns over standing water on private property should be directed to OCCHD's Consumer Protection Division at 425-4347 or 425-4348. Standing water or mosquito problems on public land should be referred to the municipality which the land is a part of. If you have questions in general about West Nile virus and its prevention, please contact the Epidemiology Services Division at 425-4437, or visit the OCCHD website at [www.cchdoc.com](http://www.cchdoc.com).