

West Nile spread by mosquitoes

How dangerous is the West Nile virus?

Dr. George Thompkins, a pathologist at the federal Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, said that even in areas where the virus is circulating, the percentage of mosquitoes carrying in the disease is small, and if a person is infected, there is less than a 1 percent chance of the disease becoming serious.

Since the virus arrived in New York City in 1999, Thompkins said, 19 people in the country have died from West Nile, and 131 have been seriously sick but recovered.

Older people have the biggest risk of getting sick from the virus, Thompkins said, and infants and people with damaged immune systems might also be more susceptible.

"We haven't found any proof that patients with compromised immunities, like AIDS or people who've had bone marrow transplants, are more likely to get sick from West Nile," Thompkins said, "but it is likely. It just makes sense for those people to be extremely cautious."

The virus was first found in the West Nile region of Uganda in 1937, Thompkins said, and since then it has spread through Africa, Eastern Europe,

Horses vaccinated for virus

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Wiley said.

A 75-year-old Missouri woman died of the disease Aug. 7, the Associated Press reported today, adding that seven Missourians have tested positive for the virus since it appeared in that state last year.

Goodland resident Lyla Mitcheck, who owns racing horses with her brother Dale, said she isn't sure if they'll immunize their animals.

"It's pretty dry out here," she said. "I haven't seen a mosquito all year. We get a lot less water than eastern Kansas does."

"We want to protect our horses, but we don't want to waste money on something they won't need. We'll have to check with the trainer in Denver and see what he's doing."

Wiley agreed the horses and

people aren't at risk in Sherman County.

At least not yet. The virus will eventually reach the area, he said, but it might not be for a few years, and it may never be a strong force here.

"The virus needs mosquitoes to carry it, and the weather in that part of the state is not good weather for mosquitoes," the biologist said. "Unless there is suddenly a lot of rain — sustained rain over a long period — it probably won't travel that far very soon."

The biologist guessed the first cases of the virus might show up in Sherman in the summer of 2004.

"I could be wrong," Wiley said. "The disease might travel faster than we think, or there might be other uncontrollable factors, but 2004 is a good guess."

the Middle East, Asia and now North America.

No one is sure how the virus got to the United States, the doctor said, but

the strain here is most closely related to the type in the Middle East.

The disease is spread when a mosquito bites an infected animal and then

bites another animal or a person. A female mosquito needs blood from animals for protein to lay eggs, Thompkins said, and they carry the virus in their salivary glands.

After the virus is in a person's bloodstream, it multiplies, Thompkins said, and in rare cases it can infect the brain.

Most of symptoms people have will be mild and will last just a few days, he said. They might include fevers, headaches, neck stiffness, and disorientation. If you think you have the disease, get a blood sample taken by a doctor, Thompkins said.

Most of the infected animals are birds, he said, although horses, cats, bats, dogs, chipmunks, skunks, squirrels and rabbits can also carry the virus.

Besides humans, the only animals which get ill from the virus are horses and birds, Thompkins said. Most horses recover, he said, but it is a good idea to try to protect the animals from mosquitoes.

Birds are affected the most by the virus. If you want to get a dead bird tested for the disease, you can call the Kansas West Nile Virus Surveillance Center at (866) 452-7810. If the bird meets the center's criteria, they will pick it up.

Secretary to decide prairie dog protection

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Ranchers told Interior Secretary Gale Norton that black-tailed prairie dogs have too dangd much protection from the federal government.

At a meeting in South Dakota over the weekend, Norton heard complaints from ranchers who said prairie dogs devastate rangeland, threaten their livelihoods and damage wildlife habitat.

Norton said science will determine whether prairie dogs are to be listed as a threatened species. She said the Interior Department will work closely with South Dakota and other Western states developing their own prairie-dog conservation plans to avoid having the animals listed.

Prairie Dogs have dropped in numbers drastically from the days when they lived in dens of millions.

Two years ago, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service determined that

prairie dogs deserve to be listed as threatened.

Edgemont rancher Mark Hollenbeck, a lobbyist for the South Dakota Stockgrowers Association, pointed to maps showing big prairie-dog populations in counties in western South Dakota.

"What kind of policy do you have that allows that to even be considered as an endangered species?" he asked.

Jay Davis of the Sierra Club said 98 percent of the prairie dogs present when explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark traveled across the country have gone the way of the dodo.

"Part of why that's hard to believe is that a good part of that 2 percent happens to reside in western South Dakota," he added. "We have to respect the ranchers trying to make a livelihood."

"We also have to hang onto the 2 percent of the prairie dog population that still exists."

City picks trash company to deal with

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\$10 per month plus a \$3.25 tipping fee. Randy Toppliff, CEKK's representative, said his company would charge \$14.90 per month, plus a tipping fee of about \$4 which would have been adjusted monthly.

Toppliff originally offered \$380,000 for the city's trucks and equipment, but \$28,000 of that was for equipment the city did not want to sell.

The Colorado firm wants to build a transfer station and wants to be paid \$576,299 per year to pick up trash, what the city has budgeted to do it next year. Hurd said he didn't think the city should be locked into paying that amount, and that it should be adjusted depending how many people are using the service.

"That's something we'll have to talk about in negotiations," he said.

Dave Sanders, chief financial officer of U.S. Waste Industries, said his company would haul Goodland's trash to its landfill in Colorado Springs, and people would not have to sort it.

"If it can fit in a dumpster, we can take it," Sanders said, adding that they won't be able to handle industrial hazardous waste.

City Manager Ron Pickman said the reason the city started looking into the contracting the service was so customers would not have to sort their garbage.

"It was a convenience issue," Pickman said. "We wanted to make it easier on people."

The city was also on the verge of having to raise rates, Pickman said. At the end of this year there should be a \$79,000 surplus in the solid waste fund, but only \$5,000 at the end of 2003.

"We are looking at having to raise \$75,000 to \$80,000, spread out over all our customers," Pickman said. "The commission wanted to try to keep prices the same, or even lower them, with a private company."

Toppliff told the commission it would be better in the long run to choose a Goodland company.

"Every dollar you spend locally will stay here locally," he said.

Sanders stressed that his company was offering more money for the equipment and would not raise rates.

"Which is the better deal?" Sanders asked. "Which has more to offer?"

Sanders said his company hopes to get Sherman County to reduce its \$150 solid waste landfill fee, because it will have less operational costs if the city's trash isn't taken to its landfill.

Commissioner Tiede said, though, that the county will not lower the fee. He said the county's landfill would still have to stay open for rural customers, and the county still has to deal with groundwater contamination at the old landfill, which is a long-term problem.

Farmers to talk about farm conditions

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vious five years and the number they came up with was what the Department of Agriculture has used when figuring farm payments. That number is called the crop base, he said.

Farm yields, Mote added, have been frozen since 1985. Before that, he said, farmers would average their crop base and yield each year.

Mote said farmers now have a one-time opportunity to update their base

and yield numbers before they are frozen again until 2007, when the farm bill expires. Farmers can either change the numbers, he said, or keep the old ones.

The new bill, Mote said, allows farmers to include sunflower and soybean acreage in their base. Those crops were eligible for loan programs before, he said, but not for direct payments.

At the meetings, Mote said, he will explain the rules farmers have to follow when changing their base and yield.

While the figures were frozen in the 1996 farm bill, he said, the federal payments were gradually reduced.

He said the idea was to lessen farmers' dependency on payments and have them make more money off the market.

That approach didn't work, Mote said, and the department has instead had to make emergency payments to farmers to compensate for what their not getting from the market.

The 2002 farm bill is a return to more of an income-support program, he said.

Hays man charged in theft of paintings

HAYS (AP) — A Hays man was charged Monday in the theft of 12 paintings by local artist John Cody. A second Hays man was charged with possession of the stolen paintings.

Mitchell M. Nestir, 29, is charged with theft of items worth more than \$25,000, vehicle burglary and car theft. Nestir is suspected of stealing a car that had the paintings in the trunk. When the car was recovered, the paintings and other items were not inside it.

Nestir is being held on \$100,000 bond in Ellis County Jail. His bond on a Trego County charge of felony theft has been revoked.

Enid C. Tagimacruz, 46, is charged with knowingly possessing stolen property after he allegedly hid the paintings when Nestir brought them to him. Tagimacruz is being held on \$100,000 bond for the art theft, and also is being held on a warrant for failure to appear in Ellis County District

Court on an aggravated assault charge.

The paintings, watercolor renderings of Saturniid moths had an estimated value of \$250,000. They had been loaned to Commerce Bank for a July exhibition. Hays Arts Council Director Brenda Meder had the paintings in the trunk of her car when it was stolen Aug. 6.

The paintings were recovered after Nestir and another man were arrested Aug. 12 in abeating.

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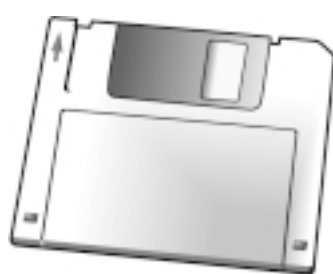
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