

Your Health

A newsletter dedicated to student health issues at Minnesota State University

Fall 2002

Virus Transmitted by Mosquitoes found in Minnesota

The West Nile virus, which made 1999 headlines on the East Coast, has been found in Minnesota. As residents of a state known for an abundance of mosquitoes, it makes sense we arm ourselves with accurate information about West Nile Virus and knowledge of proper precautions.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, the West Nile virus, a virus found in birds and spread by mosquitoes, caused 7 deaths in the New York area in 1999, the first year it was detected in the United States. In humans, West Nile virus can cause encephalitis—an inflammation of the brain. Following transmission of the virus from an infected mosquito to a person, West Nile virus multiplies in the person's blood and crosses the blood-brain barrier to reach the brain. The virus interferes with normal central nervous system functioning and causes inflammation of brain tissue. Most infections of West Nile encephalitis are mild and may include symptoms such as fever, headache, body aches and, occasionally, a skin rash. In more severe infections, symptoms include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, disorientation, coma, convulsions, muscle weakness and, rarely, death. Less than 1% of those who become infected will become severely ill. Symptoms usually appear within 3 to 15 days from infection. If you think you have symptoms of West Nile virus, contact your health care provider. A blood sample can confirm an infection.

The following precautions, offered by the Centers for Disease Control, can lower the risk of becoming infected with West Nile virus:



- ✓ stay indoors when mosquitoes are most active (dawn, dusk, early evening)
- ✓ wear long-sleeved shirts and pants whenever you are outside
- ✓ spray clothing with repellents containing permethrin or DEET
- ✓ apply insect repellent sparingly to exposed skin (an effective repellent will contain 35% DEET)
- ✓ install or repair window or door screens to keep mosquitoes outside

Time to Put the Legend to Rest

Have you heard the story about someone reaching their hand into the coin return of pay phones or pop machines and getting poked by a hypodermic needle covered with AIDS-infected blood? Or that the song, "Puff the Magic Dragon" is a song about cocaine/marijuana? Or how about that MSU has the highest STD rate in Minnesota/the U.S./the world? Any of these urban legends sound familiar? All of these statements, including the last about MSU being famous for an incredibly high rate of sexually transmitted infections, is false. The legend about MSU and STDs seems to come up every year at summer orientation and again during the first few weeks of Fall semester. It's time to put the legend to rest.

MSU DOES NOT have an unusually large number of students with a sexually transmitted infection. Students who attend MSU are like students at most other colleges: some students at MSU have STDs, most students don't.

Five different sexually transmitted infections are "tracked" by the Minnesota Department of Health: chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, HIV, and AIDS. According to the Minnesota Health Profiles for 2000, Blue Earth county (the county MSU is in) reported the following STDs for 1999: chlamydia--49 cases; gonorrhea--7 cases; syphilis (all stages)--0; HIV--0; AIDS--0. Many other infections spread through sexual activity, such as herpes and HPV/genital warts, are not tracked by the Department of Health. National statistics provide additional information: 2/3 of all STDs occur in people 25 years of age or younger; at least one in four Americans will contract an STD at some point in their lives.

What do these numbers mean? It means that MSU students, like other college students, should continue to use barrier protection (a condom or dental dam) during sexual activities, get tested for sexually transmitted infections, and talk to perspective partners about past activities. Avoid sexual activity when using alcohol and other drugs. They can lessen a person's ability to make healthy sexual choices.

For urban legend information, log onto the Urban Legend Reference Page at www.snopes.com.



Most MSU Students...

Recently, over 1200 MSU students participated in two national research studies (Harvard College Alcohol Study-2001 and National College Health Assessment-2002) These two surveys provide information about MSU student health status and behaviors. The following numbers are based on those survey results:

Most MSU students...

- ...have four or fewer drinks when they party or do not drink at all (72%).
- ...support alcohol-free dorms (89%).
- ...eat before & during drinking (88%).
- ...have a designated driver (89%).
- ...keep track of the number of drinks they consume (63%).
- ...have never tried marijuana (61%).
- ...have never been in trouble with the police because of alcohol (92%).
- ...have never used Ecstasy (91%).
- ...say their academic work is important or very important (93%).

Maverick Majority

For additional statistics or more information on Maverick Majority, contact MSU Health Education at 389-5689.

Meningitis vaccine to be offered to MSU students



Student Health Services at Minnesota State University, Mankato will once again be offering meningitis vaccine to students. A special emphasis will be placed on notifying first year students living in the residence halls. According to the Centers for Disease Control and the American College Health Association, freshman living in dormitory-style settings have a 6.33 times higher risk of meningococcal (muh-NIN-ja-ka-kal) disease than do college students overall.

Approximately 3000 cases of meningococcal disease occur each year in the United States, and 10% to 13% of the patients die. An additional 10% have severe aftereffects of the disease, including mental retardation, hearing loss and loss of limbs.

The vaccination offered provides protection against some types of the bacterium *Neisseria meningitidis*, also called meningococcus. This bacterium is a cause of bacterial meningitis and sepsis in young adults in the United States. The vaccine is safe, effective, and provides protection for approximately three to five years. While the vaccine available is effective, it does not provide 100% protection against all meningitis. Vaccination does not provide protection from viral meningitis or all types of the the *Neisseria meningitidis* bacterium that can cause meningitis. It does provide 85% protection against the most common *Neisseria meningitidis* types that occur in college freshman.

Early symptoms of meningococcal infection include fever, severe headache, nausea, vomiting, discomfort looking into bright lights, lethargy, stiff neck and rash. The progression of the disease can be very rapid. Early diagnosis and appropriate treatment are essential.

A special vaccination clinic is being planned for Wednesday, October 23rd in CSU Room 253. Vaccination hours are from 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Cost of the vaccination is approximately \$85.

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Top Ten Facts About Sexual Assault and Alcohol

10~80% of college students who had unwanted sex were under the influence of alcohol.¹

9~Men are more likely than women to assume that someone who drinks alcohol on a date is a willing sex partner. 40% of men who think this way also believe it is acceptable to force sex on someone who is intoxicated.²

8~47% of college students who were raped believe they were unable to effectively resist as a result of their own alcohol use.³

7~Alcohol use can contribute to an atmosphere where anything goes, including rape by individuals or groups of individuals.

6~Alcohol impairs judgement and lowers inhibitions, making some people more likely to force sex on an unwilling partner.

5~Alcohol slows reflexes and can impair the victim's ability to recognize a potentially dangerous situation.

4~Under the influence of alcohol, men are more likely to interpret a woman's smile, laughter, clothes, or body language, as evidence she wants to have sex.

3~Alcohol use at the time of the attack was found to be one of the four strongest predictors of a college woman being raped.⁴

2~Sexual assault is a crime of violence. Alcohol never justifies violent behavior.

And the number 1 fact is...

An incapacitated person does not forfeit his/her rights. Many state laws recognize that when someone is drunk, they are unable to give consent. If you have sex with someone who is passed out or incapable of giving consent, it might be considered RAPE.

Sources:

1. Core Institute, University of Southern Illinois, 1995
2. Journal of American College Health, 1991
3. State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, 1995
4. Koss and Dinero, 1989

