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SENTINEL CHICKENS READY TO TAKE MOSQUITO BITE

PALM BEACH COUNTY, FL—The Palm Beach County Health Department has seven sentinel chicken sites in place and will be conducting weekly testing for the presence of mosquito borne diseases that can infect people throughout the mosquito season.

During the past several years the mosquito population in the area has been below average. Many attribute the low populations with the below average rainfalls the area has experienced. Mosquito eggs hatch out in standing water. The recent rainfalls have created favorable conditions for the mosquito population to increase and all should be aware that the bite of a mosquito can infect a person with West Nile Virus, St. Louis Encephalitis, and even Malaria as was experienced in 2003.

The Sentinel Chickens do not contract these diseases but can carry the virus in their blood following a mosquito bite. The testing gives all an early warning should mosquitoes be carrying the diseases.

“Prevention is the key to good health,” said Health Department Director Jean Malecki, M.D. “Simple measures like avoiding mosquito bites and early detection through the sentinel chicken program are excellent preventive measures all of us can take. “ Malecki added that Palm Beach County has not had a human case of West Nile Virus in five years and hopes that the trend will continue.

Statewide, Eastern Equine Encephalitis that primarily effects horses has had 45 reported cases since January. The Department of Agriculture is advising horse owners to have their vaccinations up to date. There is no West Nile Virus or EEE vaccine available for humans.

Preventive measures people can take to reduce the risk of mosquito bites are:

- From dusk to dawn use an insect repellent when outdoors
- Wear light comfortable clothes with long sleeves, long pants and socks at night
- Drain standing water from around the house including pots, boat covers, containers, gutters.
- Repair any screens that may have holes.

Information can be obtained on numerous health issues at the Health Department website, www.pbchd.com.

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