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PREVENT MOSQUITO BORNE ILLNESS THIS SUMMER

PALM BEACH COUNTY, FL – The Palm Beach County Health Department has sentinel chicken sites in place throughout the county and conducts weekly testing for the presence of mosquito borne diseases that can infect people and animals throughout the mosquito season.

Mosquito populations thrive in South Florida and their eggs hatch out in standing water. 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 Alina Alonso, 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 to prevent mosquito borne diseases.

The Florida Department of Health has been seeing an increase in eastern equine encephalitis virus activity in a couple of our neighboring counties. While our Palm Beach County sentinel chickens are negative, two EEEV-confirmed positive horses were reported in Osceola and Okeechobee counties. Seventeen sentinel chickens from Brevard, Citrus, Flagler, Leon, Martin, Orange, Putnam, Sarasota, St. Johns, and Volusia counties tested positive for antibodies to EEEV. **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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