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Asian Tiger Mosquito and Heavy Rainfall Compound Human Health Concerns

BREWSTER, NY—Increased temperatures and rainfall in the Northeast are a reality. Total precipitation is up and so are “large rainfall events,” according to the New York State Water Resources Institute at Cornell University. Both these factors have the potential to affect human health by increasing mosquito populations, and now the Asian tiger mosquito, which can carry West Nile virus, also appears headed this way.

“Rain storms often result in pooling water,” states Robert Morris, PE, MPH, Director of Environmental Health at the Putnam County Department of Health. “Anything in your yard that collects water can become a breeding pond for mosquitos if left for more than four days. Even small items like a bottle cap can trap enough water to breed hundreds of mosquitos. The Asian tiger mosquito is of particular concern because it’s moving north and has an aggressive, daytime biting behavior.”

“In Putnam we are currently concerned about West Nile virus,” reports Allen Beals, MD, Commissioner of Health. “While no human cases of West Nile have been confirmed in our county since 2011, this can easily change with increased numbers of mosquitos or more aggressive biting.” The virus first emerged in the Western Hemisphere with a 1999 outbreak in New York City that resulted in 59 hospitalizations. In 2012, 5,674 cases were reported nationally by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“West Nile infection can result in flu-like symptoms—headaches, body aches, joint pain, vomiting, diarrhea and rash,” explains Dr. Beals. “These typically resolve easily, although fatigue and weakness can last for up to months.”

Putnam residents are advised to remove all standing water. “Checking now and after every rainfall is crucial,” continues Mr. Morris. “Anything that traps water—old tires, rain gutters, cups or cans, even leaves and tree holes—may provide a breeding spot. Drill holes in tires or dispose of them properly; clean gutters, and overturn all containers, however small.” The PCDOH continues to apply larvicide to targeted basins around the county to reduce breeding locales.

Preventing bites is another line of defense. Personal protection measures should be taken for any outdoor activities. Wear shoes and socks, and long pants and long-sleeved shirts whenever possible, and use insect repellent containing DEET as well, paying close attention to the directions provided by the manufacturer. Do not let children apply this product themselves.

The Asian Tiger mosquito, with its distinctive, white silvery bands on the legs and thorax, entered the U.S. in Texas in 1985 and has now spread to 36 states. Established populations have been detected in parts of New Jersey, Pennsylvania and southern New York on Long Island, and the insect’s range is inching northward. The Tiger mosquito bites both indoors and out, and often lives around buildings in urban areas as well, reports the CDC. Overseas these mosquitos transmit other serious illnesses as well, and have been linked to the resurgence of the viral infections chikungunya and dengue fever in Central Africa.

“These may sound like strange illnesses in faraway places,” Dr. Beals continues. “However last December, the World Health Organization reported transmission of chikungunya in Saint Martin and more than a dozen other Caribbean islands.” The CDC recommends travelers to these

destinations take all precautions necessary to prevent bites, including the application of insect repellents with DEET.

The Health Department's mission is to improve and protect the health of the Putnam County community, composed of nearly 100,000 residents. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit our website at www.putnamcountyny.com/health; or visit our social media sites on Facebook at www.facebook.com/putnamhealth and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.

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