

PATRICK-MURRAY ADMINISTRATION TAKES STEPS TO BEGIN AERIAL SPRAYING FOR MOSQUITOES IN SOUTHEASTERN MASSACHUSETTS

Increased risk of Eastern Equine Encephalitis in mosquitoes that bite humans

BOSTON – Governor Deval Patrick today announced that planning has begun for aerial spraying of pesticides against mosquitoes as early as Wednesday evening in selected areas of southeastern Massachusetts. State public health officials, working in conjunction with several other agencies and local public health partners, made the decision following continued positive tests for eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) in mosquito samples from that part of the state.

The exact timing and geographical areas to be sprayed are still being assessed, based on mosquito sample surveillance findings, environmental observations, weather conditions and other factors. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) is working with a number of stakeholder agencies in this process, including the Massachusetts Departments of Environmental Protection (DEP), Agricultural Resources (DAR), and Fish and Game (DFG), as well as the State Reclamation and Mosquito Control Board, and locally-based Mosquito Control Projects.

"As a preventative measure, I have directed the Department of Public Health to begin planning for aerial spraying against mosquitoes in select areas in the region next week," said Governor Patrick. "There are a number of precautions that residents can take to keep themselves safe this summer. These include using bug spray and covering up when outdoors, especially during peak mosquito hours of dusk to dawn."

DPH asks cities and towns in the high risk areas to curtail evening events at dusk and dawn. Outdoor events should be rescheduled for different times of the day. Those 17 communities are Acushnet, Berkley, Bridgewater, Carver, Duxbury, Fairhaven, Freetown, Halifax, Kingston, Lakeville, Mattapoisett, Middleboro, New Bedford, Plympton, Raynham, Rochester and Taunton.

In addition, 14 other communities are under moderate risk, including: Dartmouth, Dighton, East Bridgewater, Easton, Fall River, Hanson, Marion, Marshfield, Norton, Pembroke, Plymouth, Somerset, Wareham and West Bridgewater. DPH reminds the public, especially in these communities, that even if you are wearing long sleeves and using repellent, it is prudent at this time to take extra precautions.

"This has been an unusual year in terms of persistent hot weather and rainfall conditions," said DPH Commissioner John Auerbach. "We believe there is a significantly higher risk of EEE this year than in years past, but we're hopeful that the prudent use of aerial spraying will decrease that risk, along with people taking care to keep from getting bit by mosquitoes."

Specific details on the exact geographical area and timing of aerial spraying will be announced as soon as they are finalized.

There was one human case of EEE during 2008; however, there were 13 cases with six deaths from 2004 through 2006. EEE is usually spread to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito. It is a serious disease in all ages and can even cause death in some cases. Mosquito testing results from 2009 can be found on the Arbovirus Surveillance Information web page at www.mass.gov/dph/wnv.

People have an important role to play in protecting themselves and their loved ones from illnesses caused by mosquitoes.