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Day-time mosquitoes carrying West Nile, too

Virus discovered in new mosquito

By **LEIGH HOPPER**

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West Nile is now a round-the-clock threat to Harris County residents after the discovery of the virus in a hard-to-kill mosquito that bites during the day, often chasing down its prey.

The potentially deadly virus was previously found in Texas only in the meek, nighttime-biting Culex mosquito.

"Now we're not just concerned about evening and morning, we're concerned all day long," said Kathy Barton, spokeswoman for Houston Department of Health and Human Services. "Everyone has to get serious about getting rid of things containing water (where mosquitoes can breed)."

Mosquitoes get the virus, which can cause brain inflammation, from birds, and spread it to other birds, people and horses.

The discovery of West Nile in the daytime mosquito is particularly worrisome because people are 100 to 1,000 times more likely to be bitten by an Asian tiger mosquito than a Culex mosquito, said Ray Parsons, head of the Harris County Mosquito Control Division.

The Culex more or less drifts from one meal to the next at night, but the Asian tiger aggressively zeroes in on its victims during the day.

In addition, conventional spraying methods that control the Culex don't work against the Asian tiger. Pesticide-spraying from trucks or planes is impossible because high daytime temperatures force the chemical mist to float up, not down where it can reach mosquitoes. Spraying for Culex occurs at night.

"The thing about this mosquito is, there's no real way to control it," Parsons said.

This is the first time in Texas that West Nile has been confirmed in the Asian tiger, or *Aedes albopictus*, Parsons said.

West Nile symptoms may include low-grade fever, headache and swollen lymph glands. More severe infections include high fever, stiff neck and disorientation. Less than one percent of people infected become severely ill.

Experts do not yet know if the Asian tiger mosquito will become a significant carrier of the virus. In the laboratory, Asian tigers easily pick up the virus and spread it, but in nature, conditions are less conducive. For example, the Asian tiger has less opportunity to get the virus from an infected bird because they feed during the day, when birds are active. The mosquito prefers to feed on people and small mammals.

Unlike the Culex mosquito, which is a dull brown, the *Aedes albopictus* is dark, nearly black, with white marks on its legs. A single white stripe down its back can be seen with the naked eye, but Parsons recommends that the curious slap first, and look later.

The Associated Press contributed to story.

RESOURCES



WEST NILE VIRUS

- **Facts:** The Asian tiger mosquito
- **Zip codes:** Virus locations (as of 08/14/02)
- **Symptoms**
- **National Library of Medicine:** News, research and maps related to West Nile virus
- **Environmental Protection Agency:** How to control mosquitoes.
- **National Institute of Health:** Picture of the virus and background on its origins.
- **U.S. Geologic Survey:** Fact sheets on West Nile virus
- **Centers for Disease Control:** West Nile virus Q&A



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