

Be Mindful of Mosquitoes and Other Insects

In a couple of weeks my youngest son, Eric, will go to Nicaragua to work on designing a bridge. His primary care physician, to his credit, showed due diligence in recommending that my son prepare for his visit by taking preventive measures for malaria, rabies and unforeseen infections with an antibiotic and by receiving some immunizations such as Hepatitis A.

How would someone prepare for a visit to New England? Do they know about rabies? Poison ivy? Do they know about Tularemia? Do they know about deer ticks and Lyme disease? I recently learned from a cardiologist that whenever he visits Martha's Vineyard or Nantucket, he uses a "Z-Pack" of antibiotic prophylactically because of the prevalence of Lyme disease there. That tells you something.

Do visitors to New England know about Eastern Equine Encephalitis? If they have heard about it, do they realize that, although still considered rare, the results are deadly? Maybe we should all think like these two doctors and take seriously the warnings that are out there. Do you take them as seriously as the doctors do?

We recently received the news that the town of Carver had a positive testing for EEE in a "pool" of mosquitoes. At this point it is in a bird-biting mosquito.

Have you ever considered the importance of Entomology, or the study of insects? From head lice to spider bites to Lyme disease, "straw itch" from mites, and Eastern Equine Encephalitis, our insect specialists inform us. Pay attention to them. They know what they are talking about. In the case of the news from Carver, we are told that the mosquito species is a bird-biting mosquito. At this point, it is highly unlikely that a person will contract the encephalitis disease because we are not birds. If we are fortunate, we will receive other warnings. If the disease continues to grow in strength out there in nature, as it did the last couple summers, we might next hear of additional positive results in bird biting mosquitoes. It is really time to sit up and listen when we receive the news of positive results in a mammal-biting mosquito. We are mammals. The last red flag we might see, if we are fortunate, is that a horse has contracted the disease of EEE. There are no more red flags after that. The next case could be a human one. Children and the elderly are especially prone to die from this disease. People who survive will probably be disabled with severe neurological problems for the rest of their lives.

Even though we are very fortunate to live in an area with a mosquito control program, please note that it is not a mosquito eradication program. They do the best they can to prevent them with larvicides in the spring, used to safely prevent the larva developing into adult mosquitoes and for the rest of the season, ground spraying for adults. You and your neighbors can call them at 781 585 5450 or fax them a request at 781 582 1276. Many neighbors can get together and list all their addresses, so that it can be sprayed all at once.

I hope that a truck spraying your yard does not give you such a sense of security that you think other measures are not necessary. Please take all the recommended precautions, for the many insect borne diseases in New England. Wear repellent, certainly spring through fall. If you engage in activities such as hiking, surveying or horseback riding, then think of repellent as a year round precaution for deer ticks. Empty

any and all containers of standing water to prevent breeding areas for West Nile virus. Flush your birdbaths each week. Cover baby carriages with netting.

This year is, most probably, the last year in a two- to-three year cycle of EEE. Hopefully, it will not be as bad as last year, taking lives away from us. As the birds build immunity to EEE, the disease wanes and 20 years may go by before it returns. If you are young now, you may remember the years of 2004 through 2006 when the next cycle arrives. Hopefully, when that happens, as you tell your children about the time when this disease hit so close to home, you will have a happier ending to it. Maybe you will be able to say, “Now we have a vaccination for it” or “Ever since then, the State keeps a fund for aerial spraying.”

I don't now what the future holds. So, let's do what we can with the present. Stay informed and do the best we can with that information