

## 9-16-11 Memories, Mosquitoes, Recollections and Resolves

Juicy white peaches from O'Brien's peach stand in Halifax, hurricanes, the appearance of mums, the waning of the sweet corn, memories of my sister's 9-11 birthday and recollections of the day that changed the U.S.A. ; all these things return to me each and every September since 2001 and, of my sister, since last year. It is a time of great beauty and charm, bringing relief of New England's heat and humidity and introducing the first blushes of color resulting from the changes in the formation of chlorophyll in our trees.

It is a time of wonder and a time of worry for many, for this is also the peak time period for mosquito borne diseases, such as West Nile virus (WNV) and Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE).

It wasn't always this way, with every September worrying us about EEE and WNV. WNV arrived just before I started as a health agent in March 2000. It was brand new to us and scary. We've learned a lot about it since then. For instance, we've learned that people can do a lot to prevent it. It also appears that it is here to stay. It does not appear to have the cyclical pattern of EEE.

Well, at least EEE used to cyclical. Every 15 to 20 years or so, there'd be a really bad year or two or three and then it would go away for another 15 to 20 years. That certainly was what I was hoping for in 2005, when EEE took the child of five year old Adreanna Wing in Halifax. After high positive findings for EEE in 2004, 2005 and 2006, I hoped I would not see it again as a health agent. And then it all returned, prematurely, unexpectedly but real enough to kill a young man, in 2010. What was happening? Global warming? Was it the heat of last year? Mosquitoes love the heat. I don't know.

And now, in 2011, August and September have continued to bring more and more WNV and EEE in several counties of Massachusetts. A man from Raynham has died of EEE. I have read there are a couple of unconfirmed cases. That is bad news.

In response to the concerns of many, I met with Representative Tom Calter last Tuesday to talk about mosquitoes, the diseases they carry and what we can do about it.

We conversed and tried to make the information useful, without alarming. We wanted to educate and to solicit concerns and questions. So, please feel free to respond with questions and comments. We'll air it on local cable and you can get a copy by contacting me.

Here's some of what we discussed:

- The ways that we can control/prevent WNV because those WNV carrying mosquitoes prefer containers for laying their eggs and we can control containers!

- EEE starts and amplifies in the swamps. We have very little control over the big swamps. So, we need the Mosquito Control Programs to help us with larviciding in the spring and with spraying in the summer.
- So, we need to protect ourselves from EEE. Do you know the “D’s” of protection? There are many. Here are a few:
  1. Deet or other approved repellent
  2. Dawn to Dusk: avoid being outdoors
  3. Dress: sleeves and pants to cover legs and arms
  4. Doors: Repair screens on doors and windows
  5. I’ve added one more: “Dear Ones”: Use netting over baby carriages. Help neighbors. Call on the elderly.

We in Plymouth County are fortunate to have a Mosquito Control Program. They actually work year round on mosquito control. In the winter they might be out dredging ditches and removing logs from streams so that water is not stagnant. In the spring they are larviciding. In the summer, they are out every day conducting ground spraying by truck.

The spraying of individual yards ended on September first, due to budget constraints. But if people know of wet areas that are of great concern, they can talk to their local board of health about making requests for spraying of those areas.

We have received calls of concern regarding sports practices and games. Each town handles the idea of evening curfews or game cancellations differently. There is something to be said for both. If the coach has a firm “Spray if You Want to Play” policy and enforces it, there is something to be said for that organized activity. I do wish the parents and siblings would take the same advice!

As the positive findings for EEE increases, many parents wish their child’s game or practice would end earlier or be cancelled so their own child would not be penalized for not participating.

Coaches also need to be aware of away games. To find out the incidence of EEE in other towns, that information is listed on DPH’s Arbovirus page as mosquito, animal and human data by county. See: <http://westnile.ashtonweb.com/index2.asp>

To help your Board of Health keep up with the latest names and emails for coaches, please help them out by contacting them with your information. They want to keep you informed and when there is an

emergency, a group email is one of the fastest ways they can contact a lot of people on particular topics.

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