

States Declare War on Mosquitoes.

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Article Type: Brief Article
Geographic Code: 1USA
Date: Jun 1, 2000
Words: 284
Publication: State Legislatures
ISSN: 0147-6041

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) investigators have found detectable levels of genetic material related to the West Nile virus (but not the virus itself) in mosquitoes found in the historic Fort Totten's bunkers in New York City.

CDC officials believe this raises the possibility that the virus survived the winter and that the late-summer emerging Culex mosquitoes could still be infected. An estimated 1,900 people were unknowingly infected with the virus, 62 people became ill, and seven people died during the outbreak in the New York City area last year.

In response, 17 states (Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia) and Washington, D.C., have announced plans and have allocated money for mosquito abatement and surveillance programs. Some of these states also received support from CDC to beef up their activities.

Mosquito abatement consists of using chemicals to kill mosquitoes in the early stages of development, when they are most vulnerable. Surveillance consists of trapping mosquitoes, as well as dead and live birds (mosquitoes' primary blood source), to see if the virus is present. (A blood sample is taken from the live birds, then they are released.) Other methods of surveillance include using live chickens as "sentinels"--the birds, which can harbor the virus but don't become ill, are placed in mosquito-prone areas and periodically tested.

None of these methods are cheap-- Connecticut earmarked \$500,000 in addition to the \$1 million already allocated to mosquito control activities for larvicide alone.

Money may not be the only challenge--finding entomologists trained in mosquito control has been difficult in New York, leading to a backlog in hiring.

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