



# COUNTY of CUMBERLAND

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Health Officials Urge Caution When Heading Outdoors**

**The Associated Press  
RALEIGH, N.C.**

North Carolina health officials are concerned more people will be exposed to dangerous viral infections passed by mosquitoes as they head outdoors for the Labor Day weekend.

The insects have benefited from a soggy summer that has created optimum breeding conditions.

Officials believe both West Nile virus and Eastern equine encephalitis, or EEE, are in bird populations and mosquitoes throughout the state, not just in areas where they have infected humans.

N.C. health officials urged residents to protect themselves from mosquito bites that can transmit the West Nile virus.

"August and early September are big months for mosquito activity in North Carolina," said Nolan Newton, the state's pest management chief.

"People who camp and hold cookouts are often outside at the times when mosquitoes are most active, at dawn and dusk, so they should take extra precautions."

N.C. Health Director Leah Devlin urged people to use insect repellent, even if they are going to be outside only for a short time.

"A lot of folks may not want to take the time to apply mosquito repellent for just a few minutes worth of exposure, but they should," she said. "I cannot stress this enough \_ if you are outside, wear mosquito repellent."

A 53-year-old Wake County man wishes he had done so in early August.

Charles A. Williams, a forester who has always been a diligent user of bug repellent, has developed the state's third West Nile virus infection of the year. He may have contracted it at his West Raleigh home while unloading his car after a vacation, state health officials said Wednesday.

Williams has been sick since Aug. 6, when he suddenly developed body aches.

Williams said his case demonstrates how a single moment of disregard can be dangerous.

On the day he returned from a vacation to the Western United States, including several days in the Colorado Rockies, he went to his car to unload his bags and didn't use an insect repellent. He noted 15 or 20 bites but thought nothing else of it.

About four days later, he got sick.

He said the aches, fever and nausea grew so bad he went to the emergency room at Rex Healthcare on Aug. 17.

State health officials initially suspected that Williams contracted West Nile in Colorado, which has had the nation's worst outbreak this summer.

But Williams couldn't remember any mosquito problems during his trip, part of which was spent at 9,000 feet \_ too high for mosquitoes to dwell.

Williams was diagnosed with an inflammation of the brain and spinal cord called meningoencephalitis. Lab results proved a West Nile virus infection.

"It's scary," he said, adding that he still has aches, fevers and dizziness a week after being discharged from Rex. He said he has lost at least 20 pounds.

"People should not take chances with this. It's not worth your life."

Williams is the first person in North Carolina with a confirmed case of West Nile virus to talk publicly about his experience with the disease.

The virus is harbored in birds and then spread to humans by mosquitoes. The illness usually causes mild or no symptoms. However, in 1 in 150 instances, it triggers a bout of meningitis, encephalitis or a combination inflammation that affects the central nervous system.

Williams' case was re-evaluated as a North Carolina infection, not a Colorado case. He is among 1,442 people in the United States who have confirmed infections, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The number of confirmed infections has doubled since last week, when the CDC reported 715 cases. Twenty-one people have died, up from 14 last week.

Of North Carolina's two other cases, one man has recovered and the other died.

Gibbie Harris, Wake County's director of community health, said Williams' case is particularly alarming because he was healthy and in good shape. In most cases of severe infection, people have underlying medical conditions that weaken their immune systems, are elderly or are very young.

"That's the part that's distressing," Harris said.

Williams said he will make a few changes in his lifestyle, including wearing insecticide every time he goes outside.

"Whether I wear shorts and sandals any more, I don't know," he said. "I'm hoping cold weather gets here fast."

Meanwhile, Eastern equine encephalitis has been reported in a young Scotland County girl, who remains in a hospital in critical condition.

EEE is a rare viral disease. It attacks the central nervous system, causes inflammation of the brain and can be fatal to animals and humans. Wild birds serve as natural hosts for the virus. Mosquitoes bite the birds and then can transmit the virus to humans and animals.