

*Remarks for the
West Nile Virus Press Conference
August 12, 2002*

Good afternoon. Confirmed cases of the West Nile Virus in humans have been reported in 32 states, including Mississippi. At this time, there are 34 cases in the state, with one death attributed to the virus.

Our response to this situation must be measured, with full regard for the serious nature of the virus in Mississippi and detailed consideration of the true facts surrounding the virus.

I have signed a proclamation declaring a state of emergency in Mississippi for the West Nile Virus. I have taken this action after careful communication with the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency and the State Department of Health.

This proclamation is to recognize the seriousness of this issue. It will be used in our efforts to request federal assistance to protect the public health, through monitoring and eradication, and should not be cause for undue alarm.

It is important for all Mississippians to understand the true facts about the West Nile Virus. It is spread by infected mosquitoes, but the great majority of people infected with the virus will show *little or no symptoms*. Those at greatest risk are individuals over 50.

I encourage the public to be aware of their surroundings. Mosquitoes become infected after feeding on infected birds, so report any dead birds in your area to health officials immediately.

Eliminate any areas of standing water around your home. Stay indoors during the peak hours for mosquito activity, normally between dusk and dawn. If you have to be outdoors, wear long sleeves and long pants treated with insect repellent. Repellents containing DEET are most effective, but should not be used on children under the age of two.

Finally – spraying operations for mosquitoes are underway around the state. The spray is *not harmful to humans*; it will control the mosquito population but it will not cause health problems in humans.

This situation is serious and we are working closely to monitor it. We will do everything we can to ensure the public health, but again, it is important for the public to understand this virus and take active measures to prevent exposure and infection.

I'd like to ask Robert Latham and Dr. Ed Thompson to speak to this issue.