2nd human encephalitis case found
Tangipahoa Parish site of latest victim

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A second person has come down with Eastern equine encephalitis, which has killed at least 34 and possibly 70 or more horses around South Louisiana.

The disease has been confirmed in 15 of south Louisiana's 33 parishes, but people all across south Louisiana should take precautions against mosquitoes, which carry the disease, said Dr. Louise McFarland, the state epidemiologist.

"We're getting so close to every parish getting affected," she said. "I would hate for parishes next door to infected parishes to become complacent."

Most of the diagnoses are along an X drawn from Tangipahoa to St. Mary and Pointe Coupee to Lafourche parishes. However, the virus has been found in Calcasieu, Vermilion and St. Landry parishes, too.

Encephalitis, the medical word for brain inflammation, can be caused by many viruses. Symptoms can range from a fever and headache to vomiting, weakness, seizures, weakness, confusion, sleepiness and coma.

Eastern equine encephalitis is the worst of those carried by mosquitoes on this continent, says Dr. Jerome Goddard, a medical entomologist for the Mississippi Department of Health.

It kills 30 percent to 60 percent of the people it strikes, compared to a death rate of 3 percent to 20 percent for St. Louis encephalitis, 2 percent to 5 percent for Western equine encephalitis, he wrote in an article published in Please see HUMAN on Page 7A.
Human

“Infectious Medicine.” LaCrosse equine encephalitis and Venezuelan equine encephalitis kill about 1 percent of human patients, he said.

Louisiana had outbreaks of St. Louis encephalitis last year and in 1994. “Out of 19 St. Louis cases last year, there was only one death. And that person had underlying disease” which made him more vulnerable, McFarland said. The 1994 outbreak hit 15 people, killing three.

The state had four cases of Eastern Equine Encephalitis in 1997, and one case each in 1996, 1994 and 1991, she said.

Perry Myers, 47, of Morgan City remains in critical but stable care at Terrebonne General Medical Center, a hospital spokeswoman said Friday. He began feeling ill June 16 and was brought to a Morgan City hospital after he went into a coma five days later.

The latest patient is a 44-year-old woman from the Ponchatoula area, about 70 miles northeast of Morgan City. At least one horse in the Ponchatoula area has tested positive for the disease, McFarland said.

McFarland said her office got word of the second case late Thursday.

“The thing that makes this disease, which is almost always fatal in horses.

“There may be many, many more than that. We have talked to veterinarians about 30 to 40 horses that had clinical symptoms and died before they could be tested,” she said.

Eastern equine encephalitis is almost always fatal in horses, emus and ostriches. Birds native to this country carry the virus without showing symptoms.

There is no vaccine for humans but there is for animals. Anyone in south Louisiana should vaccinate horses, emus or ostriches, and take precautions against mosquitoes — especially at dusk and dawn, when they are most numerous, she said. Those precautions include wearing long pants and long-sleeved shirts heavy enough to keep mosquitoes from biting, and using insect repellent on any exposed skin.

“Look around your yard for standing water where mosquitoes may breed,” and get rid of it, she said.