

One dead in Serbian West Nile virus outbreak

September 4 2012

An outbreak of the West Nile virus in Serbia has killed an elderly woman and infected 20 other people with the mosquito-borne disease, health officials said Tuesday.

The woman was from Pancevo, a town 20 kilometres (15 miles) northeast of Belgrade. Health officials said the other infected people were from Belgrade and elsewhere in the country.

"The presence of the virus was established in 21 people in the course of July and August," Olga Dulovic, deputy director of Serbia's clinic for infectious and tropical disease, said on national radio.

About 20 other people have been hospitalised with symptoms that suggest a possible West Nile infection, and are awaiting lab test results, she added.

Dulovic said the infected people were aged between 52 and 82 and had not recently travelled to countries with known outbreaks of West Nile virus.

Serbia's Health Minister Slavica Djukic Dejanovic told the Tanjug news agency there was no danger of a West Nile virus epidemic in Serbia.

Jelena Obrenovic, an official with Serbia's public health institute, called on residents to protect themselves from mosquito bites, notably by avoiding places infested with the bug and by placing mosquito screens on

windows.

Authorities have not announced if they will spray insecticides in a bid to reduce mosquito numbers.

West Nile virus can cause symptoms similar to those of the flu, but in extreme cases can result in trembling, fever, coma and a lethal swelling of the brain tissue, known as encephalitis. It can also cause meningitis.

First discovered in Uganda in 1937, the virus is carried by birds and spread to humans by mosquitoes.

There is no known cure for the disease but 80 percent of those infected will not develop any symptoms at all.

The virus is responsible for more than 60 deaths in the United States so far this year.

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