

PRESS RELEASE

May 18, 2016

ESSEX COUNTY FREEHOLDERS CONVENE A MOSQUITO CONTROL COMMITTEE MEETING

(Newark, NJ) – The Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders convened a Mosquito Control Committee meeting on Tuesday, May 17, 2016, in the Freeholder Chambers of the Hall of Records, led by committee chair District 4 Freeholder Leonard M. Luciano of West Caldwell, New Jersey. The purpose of the meeting was to explain efforts and safeguards that have been implemented to address and control the Zika Virus here in Essex County.

The meeting was motivated by the concern of recent outbreaks of the Zika Virus internationally, most prevalent in Brazil. Since May 2015, Brazil has experienced a significant outbreak of the Zika virus and in recent months, Brazilian officials reported an increase in the number of babies born with microcephaly. Microcephaly is a condition where a baby's head is much smaller than expected and conditions have been linked to the virus. The Zika virus disease is a mosquito-borne illness. The most common symptoms of Zika virus disease are a mild fever, skin rashes, muscle and joint pain, and conjunctivitis. The illness is usually mild with symptoms lasting for several days to a week. People usually don't get sick enough to go to the hospital, and for this reason, many people might not realize they have been infected. Zika virus usually remains in the blood of an infected person for about a week, but it can be found longer in some people. Once a person has been infected, he or she is likely to be protected from future infections as per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

During the meeting, Eric Williges, Superintendent from the Division of Environmental Affairs Mosquito Control Program of the Essex County Department of Public Works, gave a comprehensive presentation of the history of the mosquito control program in Essex County and this year's plans that relate to the Zika Virus. In Essex County, an Integrated Mosquito Management System is practiced consisting of three basic components: Control Methods, Water Management and Surveillance; which all work together to produce environmentally friendly results. Control Methods are the first line of defense where the goal is to control larval and adult mosquitos. Source Reduction is something all residents can take part in by removing backyard containers that hold water and identifying water sources that can become breeding grounds for larval. Additionally, identifying water sources for the mosquito inspectors helps reduce the need for pesticide usage when water sources can be eliminated. Surveillance measures gives mosquito inspectors a long term picture from year-to-year of trends in population and identifies areas where treatment is needed. Furthermore, surveillance monitors diseases which is accomplished by setting-up traps throughout the county and they are analyzed by our biologist D'Orsay Mancuso on a regular basis. The traps help identify "hot spots" which are areas where mosquitos are prevalent and special attention is required. Further, it is difficult for an inspector to go to a site to catch mosquitos, however traps can help best see what they are dealing with. Test samples are shared with the State Department of Health.

In 2001, the West Nile Virus was introduced to New Jersey and changed the approach to mosquito control. Now mosquito control is mandated throughout the state. Currently, there is no test for "mosquitoes" to identify if they have the Zika Virus, Williges stated. Nationally, the CDC and others are more focused on "human" testing and making known the virus' effects. He went on to stress we are not anticipating a large scale of Zika outbreaks across New Jersey, specifically Essex County because "We don't have the primary vector". A vector is a mosquito that passes the disease and those species are changing currently.

The specific plan for the Zika Virus in Essex County is to increase collaboration with local and regional health departments including the Office of Emergency Management, Essex County Sheriff's Office, Essex Regional Health Commission and the Newark Department of Health in the formation of a Zika Virus Task Force. The group will tentatively meet monthly to ensure all are onboard with changes from both human and mosquito perspective and to ensure information is communicated to the public via community outreach: health fairs, street fairs and health departments. Also, since there is currently no test for mosquitos, surveillance efforts will be increased especially in the port areas where imported cases may come into the county. Trappings will be increased, as well as treatment options for the populations that occur. Yard to yard treatments are very effective. It is important to note of the roughly 500 cases of the Zika Virus nationally, there have been 0 cases in Essex County and none reported statewide at the time of the meeting.

The Mosquito Control Committee is made up of the following members: Freeholder Leonard Luciano, Chair, Freeholder Patricia Sebold, Freeholder Leby Jones and Freeholder President Britnee Timberlake. Freeholder Luciano stated, “We will make sure that we do what we can to make sure the public knows that you (Mosquito Control Program) are working very hard and there is not a high level of concern about some of the things we are hearing in the media. But if there happens to be down the road, we have taken the all the proper steps and measurements to make sure that we can contain what could potentially be a problem.” Luciano said.

The Department of Public Works, through the County Engineer Sanjeev Varghese, assured the committee the county is fully prepared with resources, personnel and funding to handle any concerns regarding mosquito control in Essex County. In addition to Eric Williges, D’Orsay Mancuso, Biologist, David Antonio, Supervising Transportation Planner and Sanjeev Varghese, County Engineer all participated in the presentation. Mosquito Control tries to respond to all residents each day. Residents may call them directly with concerns at 973-239-3366 x2480 or via the website at www.ecdpw.org under the Division of Environmental Affairs..

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