

Cool weather won't kill the mosquitoes

They'll just come out in warmer daylight hours

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The holiday season is here, bringing cooler temperatures, less rain and winter residents to the Naples area. Traditionally, this time of year also heralds the end of the major mosquito season in Naples.

The mosquito population drops naturally as rainfall decreases and there is less and less standing water to support the production of new mosquitoes. The dryer air of winter also increases the natural mortality of adult mosquitoes. These two factors combine to provide residents with the most mosquito-free months of the year.

As people say, "That's the good news." The bad news is that, while the cooler weather may promote lower mosquito numbers, there will still be mosquitoes to plague local residents throughout the winter.

Even worse, the cooler temperatures allow some mosquitoes to live longer, increasing the chance that a mosquito infected with West Nile virus will live long enough to pass the virus on to another victim. Since mosquitoes are cold-blooded, the cooler temperatures slow down their metabolism, causing the mosquitoes to remain inactive for long periods, essentially extending their lives.

All of this means that, while there will be fewer mosquitoes during the winter, residents must still be aware that there is the possibility of contracting mosquito-borne diseases such as West Nile virus. To make matters worse, the lower temperatures restrict what the Collier Mosquito Control District can do to treat the surviving mosquitoes.

The primary control method used by the CMCD to control adult mosquitoes is to make aerial applications of adulticides at night or at dawn. Applications are made at these times for a variety of reasons, but one of the main reasons is that mosquitoes are normally active, flying around looking for a blood meal at those hours. The cold temperatures keep mosquitoes from flying around at night. As a result, CMCD applications must be curtailed during the winter months because they have little impact on mosquito populations when temperatures fall below approximately 65 degrees.

What this means for local residents is that they must be prepared to protect themselves, even during the winter. On warm, sunny days mosquitoes will become active and attempt to feed on anything that comes within range, so residents still need to take precautions when outdoors. Products containing DEET have been the recommended mosquito repellents for years.

However, recent research reported on by Dr. John Smith and Dr. James Cilek of the Public Health Entomology Research and Education Center of Florida A & M University may eventually provide an effective alternative for people who do not like to use DEET. They have begun testing several new repellent products, two of which show promise. However, these new products have not been tested against either the black salt marsh mosquito, which plagues area residents, or the mosquito that transmits West Nile virus. Until these products have been tested further, residents should stick to products containing DEET.

Local residents should enjoy the outdoor environment during this holiday season but remember, if it is warm enough for shorts, it is warm enough for mosquitoes to feed on bare legs. Take precautions to ensure that you do not become a holiday meal for mosquitoes. Practice the five D's of personal protection: Avoid being out at **D**usk and **D**awn, when mosquitoes are most active.

Dress appropriately with light colored, long sleeve shirt, long pants, shoes and socks.

Use a repellent containing **D**EET according to label directions.

Drain containers such as bird baths, tires, cans, bottles, rain gutters, wading pools, and anything else that can hold water and produce mosquitoes.



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