

Coordinated effort needed to prevent encephalitis

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

Wayne County Board of Health is out to lead the way in developing a plan to protect against an epidemic of St. Louis Encephalitis (SLE).

That disease killed four people in Michigan in 1975. In addition, there were 90 other cases of SLE reported in the state in 1975, 36 of those in Wayne County. There were few outbreaks in 1976.

WAYNE COUNTY COMMISSIONER Edgar L. Harris said, "We need joint community planning and the cooperation of neighboring counties because any outbreak would more than likely not be confined to just Wayne County."

Because of the strange cyclical nature of the disease, it is usually too late to kill mosquitoes or attempt to marshal enough people or funds to control them.

"We are trying to convince our communities and nearby counties that there is a definite need," said Letto Durley, a spokesman for the Wayne board of commissioners. "We are trying to involve all local communities within Wayne County and we're trying to encourage adjacent counties to cooperate," he added.

Representatives of both the Wayne and Oakland County Environmental Health divisions agree that southeastern Michigan is ill-prepared to head off the kind of outbreaks which occurred in 1975.

Glen Brown of the Wayne County Environmental Health Division said the contingency plan "would come down to an early warning system." He said the plan would define "who would need to take what kind of action."

SLE IS CAUSED by a virus transmitted from mosquitoes to wild birds and sometimes from birds to humans. Human infections usually occur in metropolitan areas because of house sparrows and pigeons in relatively close proximity to humans.

A bird surveillance program will therefore be a focal point of the future contingency plan.

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However, Brown speculated, "The mosquitoes are here and have been here for many years. We are beginning to think it (the virus) comes from migrating birds. The mosquito bites the bird and the virus develops in the mosquito. Occasionally, a mosquito will bite a human."

He added that it was important to

note that one mosquito variety (culexipennis) is the major suspected carrier. Brown said that luckily it was a variety which does not usually bite humans.

AERIAL SPRAYING is being looked upon only as a last resort. Wayne County Commissioner Royce

Smith said, "We do not plan to go and immediately start spraying mosquitoes. We hope that our contingency plan, which includes more bird monitoring, will indicate that we won't have to spray at all."

Harris added, "What we are saying is that if we do find evidence that we should spray, the communities ought to be prepared for it when the time comes."

Brown called chemical spraying a last ditch effort. He said the chemicals would have serious side effects to other species. "The ecological system is very sensitive. It is not proper to get into spraying to control mosquito biting," he added. Instead it

should be employed only in "selective control."

Dick Parker, a sanitarian for the Oakland County Environmental Health Division, said that county would cooperate in developing a contingency plan for southeastern Michigan.

"Oakland County is in the same boat as everyone else. No one in the state is equipped to do that (massive aerial spraying)."

He characterized SLE an urban disease, and as such, all of Oakland County would not be affected. He said their efforts for mosquito control would center on the heavily urbanized southeast corner of the county.

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6/27/77	75.00		3975.00	6/27/77	75.00		3975.00
7/06/77		2200.00	1625.00	7/06/77		2200.00	1625.00
7/18/77	50.00		1675.00	7/18/77	50.00		1675.00
8/05/77	75.00		1750.00	8/05/77	75.00		1750.00
8/15/77	150.00		1900.00	8/15/77	150.00		1900.00
8/27/77		3700.00	400.00	8/27/77		3700.00	400.00
8/29/77	3700.00		4100.00	8/29/77	3700.00		4100.00
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