



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee encourages Diné citizens to learn more on Rocky Mountain spotted fever prevention

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On July 25, the Health, Education and Human Services Committee received an update from Navajo Nation Veterinary and Livestock Program director Glenda Davis regarding blood draw serology studies that were recently conducted on dog populations in several Navajo Nation communities.

The blood draws were conducted for the purpose of testing for the presence of the antibody against Rocky Mountain spotted fever within the dogs, said Davis.

Rocky Mountain spotted fever is a disease brought on by a type of bacteria carried by certain types of ticks. The bacteria is spread to humans through tick bites.

While it was reported that an undisclosed number of dogs in four communities were found to have blood draws that were positive, Davis clarified that this means the dogs that tested positive have high titers against the bacteria.

“These healthy dogs that tested positive sometime in their life were bitten by an infected tick, then recovered, and are now healthy,” Davis said.

The four communities are called “sentinel sites” for the focus of prevention and education activities on RMSF.

Every community member is urged to learn of the RMSF signs and symptoms and to actively assess their home and yards as “tick-free environments”.

Action plans are being developed for the four communities, said Davis in her report to the committee.

The Veterinary and Livestock Program, along with response partners, will be working to pinpoint where the dogs with high titers are coming from – whether from NHA housing communities or from rural sites, for example.

An appropriate response plan can be developed after this information is obtained.

Philene Herrera, Navajo Nation Health Education program manager, said she wants people to understand that this is not a dog problem.

The ticks are potential carriers of the bacteria causing RMSF; dogs are not carriers. However, dogs can carry ticks, and this is a concern for people that may have close contact with dogs.

Children are at highest risk for contracting the disease, especially at this time of the year because they are more likely to be outside and have close contact with dogs. There is an increased chance of a tick falling off a dog and landing on a child under these conditions.

Herrera said the Health Education program staff has been raising awareness of the disease in various Navajo communities, and are focusing on providing information on prevention.

The Foreign Animal Disease Task Force also urges the general public to "target the tick" efforts and to learn how to prevent ticks around your home, on your dogs and on our family members.

The Navajo Nation Veterinary and Livestock Program and the Navajo Division of Health are participatory members of the task force.

The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee recognizes the hard work that all involved programs are doing to alert the public on preventative practices and safeguarding the health of Navajo people from the disease.

Acknowledging this as a very serious public health concern, the committee stated they will assist in measures to obtain additional funding that will enable programs to continue public outreach and education on RMSF prevention.

Diné citizens are highly encouraged to learn more about what they can do to at home and in their communities to prevent ticks and eradicate the risk of RMSF.

For more information on RMSF awareness and prevention measures, Diné citizens are encouraged to contact the Navajo Nation Health Education Program at (928) 871-6258.

Various Health Education field offices are established in many communities on the Navajo Nation. When calling the Health Education office, individuals can request to be directed to the office location nearest them.

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