

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3203

September 5, 2024

The Honorable Michael Regan
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Regan:

Following recent reports of Eastern Equine Encephalitis Virus (EEEV) and West Nile Virus (WNV) in humans, horses, and mosquitoes across the Northeastern United States, I am writing to draw your attention to the growing mosquito population infected with WNV and EEEV causing the proliferation of EEEV and WNV across New York State. I am deeply concerned about the dangers these deadly mosquito-borne diseases present to New Yorkers, and strongly urge action from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in coordination with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to protect concerned residents across the state from Hempstead to Potsdam and Albany to Buffalo. The EPA has historically given state and local mosquito control departments necessary tools to control the mosquito population and with the increase in dangerous diseases spread by infected mosquitos, we need EPA's assistance now more than ever before.

So far in 2024, the New York State Department of Health (NYS DOH) has confirmed at least 20 human cases of WNV and 1,868 WNV-positive mosquito pools, including at least three human WNV cases, one horse WNV case, and 226 WNV-positive mosquito pools across Upstate New York. Although no human cases of EEEV have been reported in New York this year, the NYS DOH has confirmed the presence of at least 14 cases of EEEV in horses across ten Upstate counties, including St. Lawrence, Madison, Oneida, Cayuga, Orange, Ulster, Wayne, Washington, Clinton, and Franklin, as well as at least 19 EEEV-positive mosquito pools. To date, all reported cases of EEEV and EEEV-positive mosquito pools have been located in Upstate New York. Currently, the epicenter for EEEV is in St. Lawrence County where five horses have contracted the virus. In response to the rise in cases, New York Governor Kathy Hochul recently declared an "Imminent Threat to Public Health" in the county.

To get ahead of these viruses and stem their spread in our communities, I urge the EPA to work directly with New York officials to ensure communities statewide have access to effective nonchemical control tools and the latest public health guidance to protect New Yorkers. The only way we can control the spread of EEEV and WNV in New York State will be a concerted effort by officials and the public working together to prevent the growth of the infected mosquito population.

Since there are no vaccines or treatments currently available for EEEV, it is of the utmost importance to prevent transmission to humans by means of mosquito control and encourage counties to take all precautionary measures to protect their residents. EEEV is fatal in about 30% of people who are affected by it, and survivors also report experiencing neurologic problems. The disease can worsen quickly, with symptoms at the onset often including fever, headache and stiff neck, which all potentially lead to severe swelling of the brain, called encephalitis, the most serious complication.

After a 41-year old New Hampshire man recently contracted and died from EEEV mere hours from the New York state line, concern across the state is rapidly reaching a fever pitch. With no time to waste, I strongly urge the EPA, acting alongside the CDC, to swiftly furnish my office with a plan outlining how the agency will coordinate with state, county and local officials in New York to amplify mosquito control and warn health care providers, public health officials and the broader community about the dangers of EEEV and WNV. Additionally, please highlight any EPA efforts that are already underway to spread awareness about these mosquito-borne diseases, and explain what the agency's capacity is to help eradicate the infected mosquito population, and the consequential spread of EEEV and WNV by working with the CDC.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter as we continue to defend the safety of New Yorkers across the state. I look forward to receiving and reviewing the EPA's plan as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles Schumer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Charles" and last name "Schumer" clearly distinguishable.

Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator