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County poised to subcontract immunizations

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In response to a state directive, Montrose County is likely to subcontract to a local clinic immunization services.

The state health department notified Montrose County Public Health Director Jim Austin that the county must either open its own clinic to provide the immunizations or contract the work out to a partner agency. Commissioners are considering River Valley Family Health Centers for the work — “the obvious choice,” Austin told them during a work session earlier this week.

River Valley is a federally qualified health center with two locations in Montrose, both of which have several bilingual staff members. “Those are all pluses,” Austin said Friday.

Also, River Valley is already a designated vaccines for children (VFC) provider for those enrolled in Medicaid, or who have no insurance, or who are Native American. Children who are under-insured also can receive VFC at a federally qualified health center.

River Valley further participates in a federal drug pricing program through which it receives certain outpatient medications and vaccines at reduced cost.

County dollars are not at play in the possible contract with River Valley, Austin said. The state passes money to the county for immunizations and that money — \$46,855 covering Oct. 1 — June 20, 2023 — would in turn pay for such a contract, if one is approved.

County commissioners are set to consider the agreement with River Valley for immunization services at their Sept. 21 meeting.

Montrose County formerly offered immunizations directly through Health and Human Services, but ceased doing so the summer of 2020. At the time, the county referred people to local providers, but the county is now required to either provide the shots or do so through a contract arrangement. That does not mean the county will stop listing all providers that provide immunizations; a list remains available at montrosecounty.net/116/Immunizations.

“We’re not going to limit our promoting to River Valley,” said Austin.

He later shared that the PIC Place is applying with the state to be a designated VFC site.

Public health remains committed to finding ways to expand access to services, Montrose County Communications Director Katie Yergensen said.

Plans are underway to again host a walk-in/drive-through flu vaccination clinic in October; details are pending.

Montrose County continues as a hotspot for West Nile virus, with three deaths and several hospitalizations.

Commissioners were told public health had investigated 30 cases this season, as of Monday, Sept. 12, and as of that time, between 10 and 15 people had been hospitalized with serious complications, including meningitis and encephalitis.

Because local data tend to be more timely than state data for West Nile, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment showed Montrose County with 25 cases.

Austin told commissioners that health care providers are very aware of the spike in cases through conferences and updates with each other and Dr. Joe Adragna, the county’s medical advisor.

Austin during the work session reiterated the message is the same as ever: prevention, especially when it comes to keeping property free of standing water.

“It’s the same recommendation every year,” he said Friday. “It’s just with cases up, people are paying a lot more attention this year.”

West Nile virus ordinarily presents with mild symptoms or none at all, but some people, particularly older adults and those with certain medical conditions, are at greater risk. About 1% of people infected develop a serious complication, such as meningitis or encephalitis.

There is no treatment specific to West Nile virus itself, so experts recommend taking steps to reduce being bitten by the mosquito that transmits the virus in the first place. The culex mosquito can contract the virus from infected birds and pass it along to humans and animals it then bites.

When outdoors, use insect repellents containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, and some oil of lemon eucalyptus, and para-menthane-diol.

Try to not be outdoors at dusk or dawn, when the culex mosquitoes are most active. When in areas where mosquitoes are common, wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts and spray your clothing with insect repellent for additional protection.

At home, drain all standing water at least once a week, including from old tires, flowerpots, watering cans, clogged gutters, rain barrels, toys, birdbaths and puddles. Keep window and door screens in good repair. Use yellow “bug lights” outdoors, which attract fewer mosquitoes than most other outdoor lights.

Additional information can be found at <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/>

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