

Blood in West Nile case from E.V.

Donations did not receive individual tests

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Blood used in a transfusion now under investigation for a possible link to a West Nile virus death came from two south East Valley donors, according to United Blood Services of Arizona.

The donated blood was tested using a less sensitive testing method than the one now in place to detect the virus. Officials from the blood bank said they will find out today if the donors, who were

recently retested for West Nile, had been exposed to the virus. United Blood Services is also retesting the original samples from the two units of blood used in the transfusion.

The Arizona Department of Health Services is investigating whether the blood transfusion a Navajo County man received for surgery at a Valley hospital was tainted with the West Nile virus, said Clare Kioski, a state epidemiologist conducting the investigation. The man, who was in his 40s and went home to Navajo County after the surgery, was hospitalized again with encephalitis, a

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South East Valley donors may have been exposed

neuroinvasive illness associated with West Nile.

He died within the last several days, becoming the state's fourth and youngest person to die from West Nile this year. He was also the first person from Navajo County reported with West Nile.

Last year, there were six confirmed or probable cases in which the West Nile virus was spread through a blood transfusion, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

This is Arizona's second West Nile investigation relating to a blood transfusion, said Kioski.

Last week, blood test results from the first investigation were negative.

Barb Kain, a spokeswoman for United Blood Services, said the two units of blood the

man received for his transfusion came from two south East Valley residents. When they donated blood June 10, United Blood Services of Arizona was doing batch testing in the southeast Valley, blending 16 samples together for testing, she said. Meanwhile, single-unit testing, a more sensitive test of individual samples, was being done in the north West Valley, where the epidemic appeared strongest at the time.

Three days later, United Blood Services of Arizona began single-unit testing in the south East Valley.

"West Nile started earlier than anyone expected, so we began doing single-unit testing in the north West Valley," said Kain.

United Blood Services officials will find out today if single-unit testing might have better detected the virus in

the two south East Valley donors. But batch testing, used by blood centers nationwide, is considered a sensitive and reliable testing method for West Nile, said Kain.

"We believe the sensitivity level is very strong," she said. "Blood centers across the country use batch testing, a technique in place last year that prevented the spread (through blood) of West Nile."

Kioski said she expects the re-test of the donor's original samples to come back negative because levels of the virus, if present, may have been too low to detect. If blood tests repeated recently by the two donors come back positive, there is the possibility the Navajo man got West Nile from the blood transfusion, she said.

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