

# West Nile Virus Task Force



San Joaquin Operational Area

San Joaquin Mosquito and Vector Control District

San Joaquin County:

- Public Health Services
- Agricultural Commissioner,
- Office of Emergency Services
- Environmental Health Department

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## Fact Sheet\*

### What is West Nile virus?

West Nile virus (WNV) is a mosquito-borne disease that is common in Africa, west Asia and the Middle East.

### When was West Nile virus first found in the United States?

West Nile virus was first detected in the United States in New York in 1999. Since then, WNV has spread to 46 states, Canada, and Mexico.

### Has West Nile virus been detected in California ?

In 2003, three locally acquired human WNV cases were detected in residents of Los Angeles, Imperial, and Riverside counties, and WNV activity was detected in dead birds, mosquitoes, sentinel chickens, and a horse in six southern California counties. West Nile virus has also been detected in 2004 in southern California.

### How many human cases of West Nile virus were found in 2003?

Last year (2003) there were almost 10,000 human cases of WNV detected, including 262 deaths in the United States.

### How does someone get West Nile virus?

People usually get WNV from the bite of an infected mosquito. There is also evidence that WNV can be acquired via a blood transfusion or organ transplant from an infected donor.

### What are the symptoms and treatment?

Most people who are bitten by a mosquito with WNV will not get sick. People who do become ill may experience mild to moderate flu-like symptoms like fever, headache and body ache. It is estimated that less than 1% of the people who are infected with WNV become severely ill and require hospitalization. The elderly and immunocompromised are particularly susceptible to illness caused by WNV.

- Currently there is no specific treatment for WNV infection. Since it is a virus it does not respond to antibiotics. In severe cases hospitalization and supportive care is important.
- If you have symptoms of West Nile virus, call your doctor.

### Is there a vaccine available to protect humans from West Nile virus?

No. Currently there is no WNV vaccine available for humans. Many scientists are working on this issue, and there is hope that a vaccine will become available in the next few years.

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**What is the incubation period in humans (i.e., time from infection to onset of disease symptoms) for West Nile encephalitis?**

Usually 3 to 14 days.

**How can people protect themselves?**

- Avoid spending time outside at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are active. They are especially active for two hours after sunset.
- When outdoors, wear long pants, long sleeve shirts and other protective clothing.
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET according to label instructions.
- Make sure that doors and windows have tight fitting screens. Repair or replace screens that have tears or holes.
- Eliminate all sources of standing water that can support mosquito breeding.

**What are state and local agencies doing to control the spread of West Nile virus?**

California has a long history of conducting surveillance for mosquito-borne viruses and has taken active steps to ensure early detection of WNV. Due to ongoing collaboration between over 70 local mosquito and vector control agencies and state public agencies, California is well prepared to detect, monitor, and respond to WNV. These agencies use a variety of scientific techniques and products to control mosquitoes in their earliest stages and play a key role in reducing the risk of WNV. Also California has launched a statewide public education effort about personal protection measures and reporting dead birds.

**Why is the public urged to report dead birds?**

The public is encouraged to assist in the efforts to detect and monitor WNV by calling the WNV hotline if they find a crow, raven, magpie, jay, sparrow, finch, or hawk that has been dead for about a day. Birds play an important role in maintaining and spreading this virus. Mosquitoes acquire the virus from infected birds, and then transmit the virus to people. Evidence of the virus in dead birds is often the first indication that WNV has been introduced into a new region. DHS has set up a toll free hotline for the public to report dead birds: 877-WNV-BIRD or 877-968-2473.

\* Sources of this information were taken from the California Department of Health Service's web site @ [westnile.ca.gov/facts.htm](http://westnile.ca.gov/facts.htm) and from the Department of Health & Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's web site @ [cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/q&a.htm](http://cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/q&a.htm)

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