

West Nile Virus Spreading Rapidly

...Take Precautions to Protect Yourself and Your Family

West Nile Virus has been spreading rapidly across the United States since 1999. By 2003, WNV spread to almost every state with 9,862 human cases and 264 deaths. This year, the virus has made an early appearance in Southern California. It is expected to spread across California, including San Joaquin County, this summer.

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a mosquito-transmitted virus that is primarily passed by mosquitoes to birds. The migrating birds spread the disease from region to region. The virus can be transmitted to humans and animals if an infected mosquito bites them.

Many people who are infected with WNV have no symptoms. Approximately 15% of individuals who are infected develop an illness with fever, headache, nausea, body aches, skin rash, or swollen lymph nodes. In a smaller percentage (<1%), a more severe illness (e.g. viral meningitis or encephalitis) may develop. The more severe illnesses often require hospitalization. The symptoms of severe infection may include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, mental confusion, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, paralysis, coma, or death. There is no specific treatment for West Nile Virus infection and no human vaccine at this time. Medical care should be sought as soon as possible for persons who have symptoms suggesting severe illness.

San Joaquin County Public Health Officer Dr. Karen Furst believes that it is likely the virus will be found in Northern California within the next few months. West Nile Virus monitoring methods usually first detect the virus in birds or mosquitoes. When that happens, human and horse cases may soon follow. "The best defense against WNV is to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes," said Dr. Furst.

Specific steps that you can take to avoid mosquito bites are:

- When outdoors, apply insect repellent containing DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide) according to label instructions.
- Wear long-sleeves, long pants and socks when outdoors at peak mosquito times.
- Avoid outdoor activities at dusk and dawn or take extra care to use repellent and protective clothing during evening and early morning.
- Eliminate standing water around your home and property where mosquitoes can breed.
- Report large numbers of mosquitoes or mosquito infestations to the Mosquito and Vector Control District at (209) 982-4675 or 1-800-300-4675.
- Report dead birds by calling 1-877-WNV-BIRD (1-877-968-2473).

There are several good sources of information if you want to know more about West Nile Virus and how to prevent it. Web sites include: www.sjgov.org/oes; www.westnile.ca.gov; www.cdc.gov. For local pre-recorded WNV information call 209-469-8200. The California Department of Health Services WNV Hotline is 1-877-968-2473.



