



News Release

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CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH ANNOUNCES FIRST DEATH FROM WEST NILE VIRUS IN 2008

SACRAMENTO – Dr. Mark Horton, director of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), announced today that West Nile virus (WNV) has claimed the life of an elderly woman in Orange County. She is the first death this year in California from complications associated with the virus.

“This unfortunate death reminds us that we must take precautions to protect ourselves and our families from mosquito bites,” Horton said. “Californians should use insect repellent and eliminate all sources of standing water that can support mosquito breeding.”

To date in 2008, WNV activity has been detected in 38 of California’s 58 counties. In addition to the death, 96 people have become ill with WNV infections in 13 counties. WNV also has been detected in 1,295 dead birds, 1,101 mosquito samples, five horses, 109 sentinel chickens and nine squirrels.

Last year at this time, WNV activity had been detected in 48 counties and 148 people had been confirmed with WNV infections, including nine deaths.

WNV is transmitted to humans and animals through a mosquito bite. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds.

Most individuals who are infected with WNV will not experience any illness. However, individuals 50 years of age and older have a higher chance of getting sick and are more likely to develop serious symptoms when infected with WNV. Recent data also indicate that those with diabetes and/or hypertension are at greatest risk for serious illness.

The most effective ways for individuals to prevent exposure to mosquito bites and WNV are:

- **DEET** – Apply insect repellent containing DEET, picaradin, oil of lemon eucalyptus or IR 3535 according to label instructions. Repellents keep the mosquitoes from biting you. DEET can be used safely on infants and children 2 months of age and older.

- DRESS – Wear clothing that reduces the risk of skin exposure.
- DAWN AND DUSK – Mosquitoes that carry WNV bite in the early morning and evening so it is important to wear repellent at this time. Make sure that your doors and windows have tight-fitting screens to keep out mosquitoes. Repair or replace screens with tears or holes.
- DRAIN – Mosquitoes lay their eggs on standing water. Eliminate all sources of standing water on your property, including flower pots, old car tires, rain gutters and pet bowls. If you have a pond, use mosquito fish or commercially available products to eliminate mosquito larvae. Also, report neglected swimming pools that may be breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

California's WNV Web site – www.westnile.ca.gov – includes the latest information on WNV activity in the state. In order to help identify WNV activity, Californians are encouraged to report all dead birds and dead tree squirrels on the Web site or by calling toll-free 1-877-WNV-BIRD (968-2473).

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