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STATE PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER ANNOUNCES FIRST CONFIRMED HUMAN CASE OF WEST NILE VIRUS IN CALIFORNIA THIS YEAR

SACRAMENTO - A 40-year-old San Bernardino County woman has been infected with West Nile Virus (WNV), the first confirmed human case of the disease in California this year, Dr. Richard Joseph Jackson, public health officer of the California Department of Health Services (CDHS), announced today. The woman sought medical care in May for fever, muscle aches, headache, backache and diffuse rash. She has since recovered.

"With our first confirmed human illness from West Nile virus this year and detection of the virus in dead birds, mosquitoes and sentinel chickens in southern California, public health officials are intensifying their surveillance for the virus," Jackson said.

Tests conducted by the CDHS Viral and Rickettsial Diseases Laboratory in Richmond confirmed the patient's diagnosis.

This year, WNV has been detected in birds and mosquitoes in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura counties. Health officials emphasized that the risk of serious illness to humans is low. Most individuals who are infected with WNV will not experience any illness. Approximately 10 percent to 15 percent of infected individuals will have only mild to moderate symptoms, such as fever, headache and body aches. Less than one percent of individuals will develop serious neurologic illness such as encephalitis and meningitis. The elderly and those with lowered immune systems are more susceptible to serious illness.

WNV is transmitted to humans and animals through a mosquito bite. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. Individuals can reduce their risk of mosquito-borne diseases by taking these precautions:

- Avoid spending time outside when mosquitoes are most active, especially at dawn and the first two hours after sunset.
- When outdoors, wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts.
- 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 on your property that can support mosquito breeding.

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- Contact your local mosquito and vector control agency if there is a significant mosquito problem where you live or work.

The state's current interagency surveillance system for WNV includes testing of dead birds, mosquitoes and sentinel chickens. Jackson asked the public to assist the extensive monitoring effort for the virus by reporting any crows, ravens, magpies and jays that have been dead for less than 48 hours to CDHS' toll-free hotline: 1-877-WNV-BIRD. Individuals should take note of the bird's location and condition before calling for further instructions, including assistance with identifying the type of bird found. The bird should show no signs of decomposition or maggot infestation. While there is no evidence that people can get WNV from handling live or dead infected birds, individuals should not attempt to catch or handle them. If the local agency is unable to pick up the bird, individuals should use gloves, a shovel or newspaper to put it in a plastic bag and place it in the trash.

Through June 4 this year, WNV has been found in 284 dead birds, including 123 in Los Angeles County, 122 in San Bernardino County, 35 in Riverside County, three in Orange County and one in Ventura County. In addition, the virus has been detected in 25 "pools" of mosquitoes collected in Los Angeles and Riverside counties and six sentinel chickens located near the Salton Sea in Riverside County.

The current surveillance program to monitor for WNV in California has been established by CDHS in collaboration with the University of California, Davis, California Department of Food and Agriculture, local mosquito and vector control districts and other state and local agencies.

Since horses are susceptible to WNV and a vaccine is available for horses, horse owners are advised to contact their veterinarians about timely vaccinations.

For more information about WNV or to report dead birds, visit the Web site <http://www.westnile.ca.gov/>.