



News Release

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

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FOR RELEASE:	IMMEDIATE	CONTACT:	Ken August or Lea Brooks (916) 440-7660
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STATE HEALTH OFFICER ANNOUNCES WEST NILE VIRUS HAS SPREAD TO 48 OF CALIFORNIA'S 58 COUNTIES

SACRAMENTO – West Nile virus (WNV) has been detected in seven more counties and the number of Californians who have tested positive for the virus has climbed to 249, including a Los Angeles County man who died last week, State Public Health Officer Dr. Richard Joseph Jackson announced today. The number of deaths in California from WNV infections is now six.

“Even though West Nile virus has not been detected yet in all 58 counties, the evidence shows that it is widespread in California and we all need to be vigilant about avoiding mosquito bites,” Jackson said. “In addition to personal protection, I encourage all Californians to eliminate sources of standing water in their yards that support mosquito breeding and avoid mosquito-infested areas at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active.”

A Merced County man tested positive for the virus this week, which was the first evidence of the virus in that county. In addition, tests of dead birds this week confirmed that WNV has spread to Madera, Napa, Nevada, Siskiyou and Trinity counties. The virus was also detected for the first time in Colusa County after a horse tested positive.

Of the six Californians who have died from WNV infections, three were from Los Angeles County, two from San Bernardino County and one from Orange County. WNV infections were reported in the following counties: San Bernardino, 96; Los Angeles, 81; Riverside, 51; Orange, eight; Kern, four; Fresno, two; and one each in Butte, Imperial, Lassen, Merced, Tulare, Ventura and Yolo. WNV human infections also were reported for the first time this week in Butte and Lassen counties.

WNV has also infected 122 horses, of which 60 have died. Since horses are susceptible to WNV and a vaccine for horses is available, horse owners are advised to contact their veterinarians about timely vaccinations.

Most individuals who are infected with WNV will not experience any illness. Up to 20 percent of infected individuals will have only mild to moderate symptoms, such as fever, headache and body aches. Less than 1 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 generally 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:

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- 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, which can support mosquito breeding.
- Contact your local mosquito and vector control agency if there is a significant mosquito problem where you live or work, especially if you know of abandoned swimming pools or spas.

The state's current interagency surveillance system for WNV includes testing of dead birds, mosquitoes, sentinel chickens, horses and people. Jackson asked the public to assist in the extensive monitoring effort for the virus by reporting any crows, ravens, magpies and jays that have been dead for less than 48 hours. Reporting can be done online by visiting the West Nile virus Web site at <http://www.westnile.ca.gov/>. 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. Birds with signs of decomposition or maggot infestation are not acceptable for testing. 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. Priority for bird testing is being given to those areas where WNV has not yet been detected.

For the year to date, WNV has been found in 1,726 dead birds, 616 "pools" of mosquitoes and 263 sentinel chickens.

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

For more information about WNV in California or to report dead birds online, visit CDHS' Web site at <http://www.westnile.ca.gov/>.