



# News Release

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

---

**NUMBER:** 04-52      **DATE:** September 3, 2004  
**FOR RELEASE:** IMMEDIATE      **CONTACT:** Ken August  
<http://www.dhs.ca.gov>      or Lea Brooks  
      (916) 440-7660

## **CALIFORNIA RECEIVES NEW FEDERAL FUNDING TO PROTECT THE PUBLIC FROM WEST NILE VIRUS**

SACRAMENTO – The California Department of Health Services today announced that the state will receive \$441,974 in additional federal support for activities to protect the public from West Nile virus (WNV). This week California suffered its 11<sup>th</sup> fatality from WNV, a 60-year-old Los Angeles County woman.

"This money will allow California to bolster its efforts to combat West Nile virus," said State Public Health Officer Dr. Richard Joseph Jackson. "To protect Californians from additional illnesses and deaths attributed to West Nile virus, the Schwarzenegger administration has secured new federal funds, dedicated new state budget funds and established an interagency task force to build upon California's highly regarded West Nile virus prevention efforts."

The supplemental funding from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will be used to support laboratory testing for WNV and expand public health education activities, including increasing staff to handle calls to the WNV toll-free hotline, enhancing the WNV Web site and funding a public health educator to assist with additional outreach efforts. In recognition of the public health threat posed by WNV, the 2004-05 state budget also includes \$977,000 for WNV surveillance and prevention activities and protects local mosquito and vector control agencies from cuts.

Health and Human Services Agency Secretary Kimberly Belshé has convened an interagency task force of key departments impacted by WNV to ensure the state provides a coordinated effort to minimize the impact of WNV in California.

State and local governments have been actively preparing for the emergence of WNV in California since it was first recognized on the East Coast in 1999. The coordinated surveillance system for WNV includes testing mosquitoes, sentinel chickens and suspect cases in humans and horses and evaluating dead birds for evidence of WNV infection. In addition, the state has actively engaged in public awareness efforts to educate the public on how to avoid WNV infection.

-more-

"These efforts have helped Californians to 'Fight the Bite' and limit the health impact from WNV," said Jackson. "Many families will be hiking, cycling, boating, fishing, picnicking and enjoying other outdoor activities this Labor Day weekend. I urge all Californians to protect themselves and their loved ones from mosquito bites and West Nile virus."

WNV has been detected in 56 of California's 58 counties and 430 Californians have tested positive for the virus. The virus has not yet been detected in Del Norte and San Benito counties. To date, WNV infections have been reported in the following counties: Los Angeles, 165; San Bernardino, 148; Riverside, 76; Orange, 21; Kern, eight; Fresno, three; Butte, two, and one each in Imperial, Lassen, Merced, San Diego, Tulare, Ventura and Yolo. Of the 11 deaths, five occurred in Los Angeles County, four in San Bernardino County and one each in Orange and Riverside counties.

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 WNV by taking these precautions:

- Apply insect repellent containing DEET according to label instructions.
- Eliminate all sources of standing water, which can support mosquito breeding
- Make sure that doors and windows have tight-fitting screens. Repair or replace screens that have tears or holes.
- 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.

WNV has also infected 199 horses, of which 92 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.

The Governor has asked all Californians to assist in the extensive monitoring effort for WNV by reporting any crows, ravens, magpies and jays that have been dead for less than 48 hours. Reporting can be done by calling the WNV information hotline (1-877 WNV BIRD) or logging on to the WNV Web site at <http://www.westnile.ca.gov/>.