

## PREVENT THE SPREAD OF WEST NILE VIRUS

The West Nile Virus (“WNV”) is a mosquito-borne virus, which is relatively common in Africa, West Asia and the Middle East. It was first detected in the U.S. in 1999, and as of 2004, it had been detected in 46 states, Canada and Mexico. This year the WNV has been detected in mosquitoes, wild birds, sentinel chickens, and horses in 16 California counties. As of July 1, 2004, 35 Californians have tested positive for WNV, eight in Los Angeles County, 20 in San Bernardino County, 6 in Riverside County and one in Orange County. The individual in Orange County, a 57-year old man died in June 2004 from the virus. Before this year, 2003 was the worst year for WNV in the state, recording just three cases of human infection.

WNV is a serious public-health risk, but it is important to place it in the proper perspective. Less than 1% of those bitten by infected mosquitoes will develop a serious neurological illness, such as encephalitis or meningitis. Approximately 10-15% of infected individuals will experience mild to moderate symptoms, such as fever, headache and body aches. The vast majority will not have any symptoms. People over 50 years of age and those with compromised immune systems are at higher risk than others. Fortunately, there are many things we can do to prevent the spread of WNV. The most important precaution is to make our environment as inhospitable as possible for mosquitoes. While birds are the primary “host” of the WNV virus, the virus is transmitted to mosquitoes, and mosquitoes pass it on to humans and horses. So if you are not bitten by a mosquito, you cannot get WNV -- or any other mosquito-borne illnesses.

Mosquitoes must have water to breed. Special precautions are therefore necessary to assure that you are not breeding mosquitoes.

If you have an ornamental ponds, consider stocking it with mosquito fish or goldfish. And make sure to do the following:

- Remove leaves and thin out pond lilies.
- Keep water levels high.
- Screen inlet or recirculation pump.
- If the pond is no longer desired, fill with dirt or sand.
- Remember that chlorine will NOT kill mosquito larvae (though it will kill any fish that you have stocked in the pond).

For concrete ponds or plastic swimming pools:

- Operate a filter and skimmer every day to remove egg rafts and larvae.
- Provide drainage for filter and pump sumps.
- If a pool cover is used, keep it tightly sealed.
- Remove rainwater from top of pool cover.
- Stock unused or out-of-order pools with mosquito fish.

For Boats:

- Prevent accumulation of bilge water.
- Store small boats upside down or cover to keep out of rain and water from sprinklers.

Other precautions:

- Get rid of empty buckets, pots and other water-holding items around the yard.
- Clean out your rain gutters and make sure that there is no standing water on flat roofs.
- Eliminate any puddles around your air conditioner or septic tank.
- Change water in bird baths at least once a week.
- Fill tree holes or stumps with mortar.

The Los Angeles County West Vector Control District maintains a WNV surveillance program. If you have a mosquito problem, call 310-915-7370. A technician will arrange a visit and locate mosquito breeding grounds that are causing the problem.

If you find a dead bird, especially a crow or other corvid (jay, magpie, raven, etc.), promptly call the West Nile Virus Dead Bird Surveillance Program, 877-WNV-BIRD. Do not touch the bird, and call right away, because the bird can be tested for WNV if examined within 24 hours of death.

While there is no current evidence that people can get WNV from handling live or dead infected birds, common sense dictates that you should not attempt to catch or handle them. If the local agency is unable to pick up the bird, you should use gloves, a shovel or newspaper to put the dead bird in a plastic bag and place it in the trash.

The West Vector Control District also offers the following tips for reducing the risk of infection:

- Stay indoors at dawn, dusk, and in the early evening.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants outdoors.
- Spray clothing with repellents containing permethrin or DEET to prevent mosquitoes from biting through thin clothes.
- Apply insect repellent sparingly to exposed skin. An effective repellent will contain 35% DEET. DEET in higher concentrations provides no additional protection.
- Repellents may irritate the eyes and mouth, so avoid applying to children’s hands.
- Read directions on repellants for other precautions and directions.
- Install or repair screens on windows – make sure there are no gaps that would allow mosquitoes inside.
- Vitamin B and “ultrasonic” devices are NOT effective in preventing mosquito bites.

