



**Antelope Valley Mosquito
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NEWS RELEASE

– For Immediate Release

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West Nile Virus In West Lancaster

Lancaster, CA – The Antelope Valley Mosquito & Vector Control District (AVMVCD) has received confirmation from the California Department of Health Services Viral and Rickettsial Disease Laboratory (VRDL) that antibodies to West Nile Virus (WNV) have been detected in a blood sample from a chicken in West Lancaster. The AVMVCD utilizes 8 flocks of sentinel chickens that are strategically placed throughout the Antelope Valley to detect mosquito-borne viruses such as WNV, St. Louis Encephalitis and Western Equine Encephalitis.

Currently no human or horse cases and no other signs of WNV have been reported in the Antelope Valley. Since positive birds have previously been reported in Mojave, Castaic, Santa Clarita and Apple Valley the AVMVCD has been stepping-up mosquito surveillance and control efforts in the AV for the past couple of months. “It is crazy to think that West Nile Virus is not in the AV, if it’s been detected all around us” said Karen Mellor, District Entomologist. “We just hadn’t submitted the right bird or mosquito for testing.”

In July the District received a one-year grant to conduct mosquito surveillance and control in areas of the AV that are currently not covered by any Mosquito Abatement District. Those areas include Littlerock, Lake LA, Acton, Lake Hughes and Antelope Acres, but our main focus lies in the West Palmdale and Quartz Hill, since the mosquitoes that hatch out from there could potentially fly into neighborhoods that are in the District. “We tried to convince residents of those areas last year of the importance of our services, but the majority of the voters rejected the fee of \$6-9 per year,” said Cei Kratz, District Manager. “Unfortunately the grant under which we’re treating those areas now, is only a bandage and will not help the residents there in the long run.”

As of September 7, 2004 a total of 438 human West Nile virus infections and 12 fatalities have been reported in California. There has also been a report of 199 infected horses, of which 92 died or had to be euthanized in California. Nationwide there have been a total of 1191 human cases and 30 deaths.

The virus is spread by mosquitoes, which feed on the blood of infected birds and then pass it on to humans or other animals. West Nile Virus is not spread by person-to-person contact or by handling dead birds. The dead bird surveillance is an early warning system for the range of the virus. The public is asked to help by reporting recently deceased crows and ravens by calling 1-877-WNV-BIRD (877-968-2473) or online at www.westnile.ca.gov . Use gloves, a shovel or an inverted trash bag to pick up any dead bird.

The chance that any one person is going to become ill from a single mosquito bite remains low. The risk of severe illness and death is highest for people over 50 years old, although people of all ages can become ill. About 80 percent of the people who become infected will show no symptoms at all. The milder form of the infection can include fever, headache, and body aches, and can last for as short as a few days, to several weeks. About one in 150 people infected with WNV will develop severe illness. The severe symptoms can include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, coma, and paralysis. These symptoms may last several weeks, and neurological effects may be permanent.

The technicians of the AVMVCD are working hard at reducing mosquitoes in roadside ditches and curbs, retention basins and other breeding sources we know of, but the big “unknown frontiers” are backyard sources that we are unaware of. This is where every resident is asked to contribute to the program to keep our community healthy.

Here are a few easy suggestions to reduce mosquitoes in your yard and your neighborhood:

- * Get rid of standing water – That’s where immature mosquitoes live. Empty out all small containers at least once a week, keep pools and spas chlorinated or drained, repair all water leaks and avoid over-watering. Anything that holds water longer than a week is a potential mosquito producer.
- * Make sure your sprinklers are set in a manner that will allow the ground to dry completely before the next cycle. Conserve water and prevent mosquito breeding.
- * Get mosquito-eating fish (*Gambusia affinis*) for free, if you have sources that cannot be drained (e.g. fish ponds, pools, large horse troughs).
- * Wear long sleeved shirts and pants and use mosquito repellent containing DEET when outdoors during dusk and dawn. Always follow instructions on the product label.
- * Keep tight fitting screens on doors and windows to prevent mosquitoes from entering homes.
- * Horse owners should also make sure their horses are properly vaccinated, to avoid losing them to WNV.
- * Report stagnant pools and other backyard sources to the AVMVCD, so they can treat the mosquito breeding sources accordingly.

For any further questions or services please feel free to contact the Antelope Valley Mosquito & Vector Control District by phone (661-942-2917) or check us out online at www.avmosquito.org.