



News Release

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

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http://www.dhs.ca.gov			

CALIFORNIA SECURES AN ADDITIONAL \$2.16 MILLION IN FEDERAL FUNDING TO FIGHT WEST NILE VIRUS

SACRAMENTO - Bolstering its efforts to combat West Nile virus (WNV), California has secured an additional \$2.16 million in federal funds, California Health and Human Services Agency Secretary Kimberly Belshé announced today. California actively pursued funding from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to address this public health issue.

“The Governor is committed to protecting Californians from the debilitating effects of West Nile virus,” said Belshé. “We experienced widespread West Nile virus transmission last year and the number of human cases would have been higher without the aggressive control measures conducted by state and local agencies. We anticipate an increase in West Nile virus activity this year so Californians must continue to be vigilant and fight the bite.”

The new funding will allow California to further enhance its laboratory capability, including rapid testing for suspected human cases, and will be used to train local laboratory staff, conduct enhanced surveillance in cooperation with local vector control agencies and evaluate the impact of mosquito control strategies on WNV transmission in California.

In addition to the new funds, Gov. Schwarzenegger is actively petitioning Congress for more funding on an emergency basis to expand mosquito control activities in California in 2005.

State officials highlighted the new federal funding and related projects during a WNV Awareness Week event today at the International World Peace Rose Garden in Capitol Park, Sacramento.

Through April 25, WNV has been detected in 21 California counties. No human or horse cases have been reported in 2005. The early season detection of WNV indicates that the virus successfully survived the winter and will pose a statewide public health threat in 2005.

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By closely monitoring WNV activity, state and local resources effectively target WNV “hot spots” to reduce the risk of infection to people and animals. California’s surveillance, education and testing protocols include:

- Ongoing surveillance for mosquito breeding sources by local agencies.
- Ongoing, targeted mosquito prevention and control.
- A toll-free information and dead bird reporting hotline: 1-877-WNV-BIRD.
- Targeted public education, emphasizing the importance of personal protective measures.
- Rapid and comprehensive communication with the medical community and veterinarians.
- Rapid response testing by the WNV laboratory network for timely and accurate human case determinations.
- An information Website for clinicians, the public, local agencies and others: www.westnile.ca.gov.

Efforts by the California Department of Health Services (CDHS) have been very effective in raising public awareness about WNV. The dead bird surveillance program was initiated in 2000 and 40 birds were reported that year to CDHS. Last year, the program received more than 150,000 calls and 93,000 dead bird reports. The dead bird program covers all 58 counties. To date in 2005, more than 12,100 calls have been made to the information and dead bird reporting hotline, and www.westnile.ca.gov has received more than 602,000 hits.

Additional efforts by CDHS include:

- Reminding long-term care facilities and blood centers about the importance of WNV prevention and screening.
- Partnering with multiple state agencies that serve clients or patients with increased risk to WNV, including the Departments of Social Services, Mental Health, Developmental Services, Aging and Corrections.
- Providing WNV prevention recommendations to private businesses and government agencies, including the U.S. Forest Services, California Environmental Protection Agency, California Resources Agency and California Department of Industrial Relations, for employees who work outdoors.
- Partnering with the California Department of Food and Agriculture to notify practicing veterinarians and horse owners about the threat of WNV and the need for vaccinating all horses.
- Informing clinicians about clinical trials of new WNV treatments so they will enroll individuals with the disease into treatment trials.
- Adopting new laboratory tests for humans to help differentiate past versus current infections and new confirmatory laboratory tests for higher throughput and quicker turn-around time.
- Assisting with the establishment or expansion of new mosquito control coverage in six counties in the past year.

- Helping to establish surveillance programs in several regions of California that previously did not participate in the testing of mosquitoes and sentinel chickens for WNV.
- Expanding and improving the WNV Website to ensure easy access to information on WNV prevention and control and to provide current surveillance information.
- Increasing the call capacity of the WNV hotline, streamlining the call router system and increasing staff to maximize service.
- Establishing a WNV public education program to coordinate activities with other agencies.

“Our laboratory, surveillance and public education efforts have been applauded nationally and used as models for other programs,” State Public Health Officer Dr. Richard J. Jackson said. “We take pride in our efforts to collaborate and share resources with agencies throughout the state.”

Through May 9, TV and radio stations may download several WNV television and radio public service announcements for local broadcasting. Visit <http://66.34.179.85/DHS> for specific instructions.

The Governor has proclaimed April 25 through May 1 as “West Nile Virus Awareness Week” and is encouraging all Californians to “Fight the Bite” of pesky mosquitoes. * For more information, log on to www.westnile.ca.gov. **