



News Release

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

| | | | |
|---|-----------|-----------------|---|
| NUMBER: | 05-41 | DATE: | July 21, 2005 |
| FOR RELEASE: | IMMEDIATE | CONTACT: | Ken August or Lea Brooks (916) 440-7660 |
| http://www.dhs.ca.gov | | | |

INTERIM STATE HEALTH OFFICER ANNOUNCES CALIFORNIA'S FIRST DEATH FROM WEST NILE VIRUS IN 2005

Sacramento – West Nile virus (WNV) has claimed the life of an elderly Kings County man, making him the first to die from complications associated with the virus this year in California, Interim State Public Health Officer Dr. Howard Backer announced today. Additional information about the progression of his WNV illness is being collected.

“For most people, the risk of serious illness from West Nile virus is low, but this man’s death reminds us that we all need to take precautions to protect ourselves and our families from mosquito bites,” Backer said.

To date in 2005, WNV activity has been detected in 43 of California’s 58 counties and 17 individuals from eight counties have become ill after exposure to WNV, including the Kings County man who died. Human WNV infections have been reported in the following counties: Fresno, one; Kern, one; Kings, two; Merced, one; Riverside, four; Sacramento, two; San Bernardino, one; and Tulare, five. WNV has been detected in 619 dead birds, 235 mosquito pools, 16 horses and five sentinel chickens.

WNV is transmitted to humans and animals through a mosquito bite. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. Health officials emphasized that the risk of serious illness to humans is low.

“With a wet winter and high summer temperatures in California, we expect high mosquito activity and an increase in reported illnesses associated with West Nile virus,” Backer said.

Most individuals who are infected with WNV will not experience any illness. Elderly individuals and those with compromised immune systems are at greatest risk for serious illness. The most effective ways for individuals to prevent WNV are:

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

-more-

The Governor's budget includes \$12 million in new one-time funds to supplement resources of existing mosquito control programs statewide and to expand efforts in areas of the state currently not covered. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is predicting that California will be the epicenter for WNV activity in 2005.

For more information about WNV and to report dead birds, visit www.westnile.ca.gov or call toll-free: 1-877-WNV-BIRD.

-o0o-