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SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY MAN IS FOURTH IN STATE TO DIE FROM WEST NILE VIRUS

SACRAMENTO – West Nile virus (WNV) has claimed its fourth victim in California this year. An elderly San Joaquin County man died from complications associated with the virus, Interim State Public Health Officer Dr. Howard Backer announced today. The man had been hospitalized.

“This latest tragic death is another reminder that Californians need to take measures to protect themselves from mosquito bites,” Backer said. “While the risk to most healthy people is low, we should all take the threat of West Nile virus seriously.”

A recent increase in the number of dead birds reported in the counties surrounding San Joaquin is a key indicator that West Nile activity is increasing. Control of mosquito populations is the most effective way to decrease the risk of transmission in a community.

To date in 2005, WNV activity has been detected in 47 of California’s 58 counties. A total of 134 individuals from 19 counties have become ill after exposure to WNV, including deaths from Fresno, Kings, Riverside, and San Joaquin counties. Human WNV infections have been reported in the following counties: Sacramento, 36; Riverside, 17; Tulare, 15; Kings and Stanislaus, 13 each; Kern, 10; Fresno, nine; San Bernardino, four; Orange and San Joaquin, three each; Butte and Los Angeles, two each; and Contra Costa, Merced, Placer, Solano, Sutter, Ventura and Yolo, one each.

San Joaquin County has a comprehensive mosquito control program to reduce the risk of WNV transmission to people and animals. The Governor’s budget also included \$12 million to enhance resources of existing programs and to expand efforts in areas of the state not currently covered by mosquito control services.

WNV is transmitted to humans and animals through a mosquito bite. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. While 80 percent of those infected with WNV will have no symptoms and not realize they have been infected, it is still important to take personal precautions to prevent contracting the virus. Elderly individuals and those with compromised immune systems are at greatest risk for serious illness.

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The most effective ways for individuals to avoid mosquito bites and prevent WNV are:

- Apply insect repellent containing DEET, Picaridin 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.

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