

San Joaquin County West Nile Virus Task Force



San Joaquin Operational Area

San Joaquin Mosquito and Vector Control District

San Joaquin County:

- Public Health Services
- Agricultural Commissioner
- Office of Emergency Services
- Environmental Health Department

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Fact Sheet*

What is West Nile virus? West Nile virus (WNV) is a mosquito-borne disease that is common in Africa, West Asia and the Middle East.

When was West Nile virus first found in the United States? West Nile virus was first detected in the United States in New York in 1999. Since then, WNV has spread throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

Has West Nile virus been detected in California? Yes, West Nile virus activity has been found throughout California. West Nile virus was first found in test chickens, dead birds, trapped mosquitoes, and horses and humans within San Joaquin County starting in 2004.

How many human cases of West Nile virus were found in California during 2004? Last year (2004) there were 829 human cases of WNV detected, including 28 deaths in California. In San Joaquin County, there were three cases and no deaths.

How does someone get West Nile virus and who is at most risk? People usually get WNV from the bite of an infected mosquito. There is also evidence that WNV can be acquired via a blood transfusion or organ transplant from an infected donor. In general, it has been found that people over 50 are at highest risk of getting serious disease from West Nile virus.

What are the symptoms of WNV? WNV affects the central nervous system. Symptoms vary.

- Serious Symptoms in a Few People. About one in 150 people infected with WNV will develop severe illness. The severe symptoms can include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness and paralysis. These symptoms may last several weeks, and neurological effects may be permanent.
- Milder Symptoms in Some People. Up to 20 percent of the people who become infected will display symptoms which can include fever, headache, and body aches, nausea, vomiting, and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash on the chest, stomach and back. In some cases, symptoms such as fatigue, headache, memory, and concentration problems can persist for weeks to months.
- No Symptoms in Most People. Approximately 80 percent of people (about 4 out of 5) who are infected with WNV will not show any symptoms at all.

Is there treatment for WNV?

- Currently there is no specific treatment for WNV infection. Since it is a virus it does not respond to antibiotics. In severe cases hospitalization and supportive care is needed.
- If you have symptoms of West Nile virus, call your doctor.

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Is there a vaccine available to protect humans from West Nile virus? No. Currently there is no WNV vaccine available for humans. Many scientists are working on this issue, and there is hope that a vaccine will become available in the next few years.

What is the incubation period in humans (i.e., time from infection to onset of disease symptoms) for West Nile virus? Usually 3 to 14 days.

How can people protect themselves?

- Avoid spending time outside at dawn and at dusk, when mosquitoes are most active. They are especially active for two hours after sunset.
- When outdoors, wear long pants, long sleeve shirts and other protective clothing.
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET according to label instructions. This type of repellent has been found to be most effective in providing long-term protection.
- Make sure that 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.

What are state and local agencies doing to control the spread of West Nile virus? California has a long history of conducting surveillance for mosquito-borne viruses and has taken active steps to ensure early detection of WNV. Due to ongoing collaboration between over 70 local mosquito and vector control agencies and state public agencies, California is well prepared to detect, monitor, and respond to WNV. These agencies use a variety of scientific techniques and products to control mosquitoes in their earliest stages and play a key role in reducing the risk of WNV. Also California has launched a statewide public education effort about personal protection measures and reporting dead birds.

Why is the public urged to report dead birds? Birds play an important role in spreading West Nile Virus (WNV). Mosquitoes get the virus from infected birds, and then transmit the virus to people. The public is helping to assist in the efforts to detect and monitor WNV by reporting dead birds to the WNV hotline. The California Department of Health Services (DHS) has set up a toll free hotline for the public to report dead birds: 877-WNV-BIRD or 877-968-2473 or the State web site at www.westnile.ca.gov. Although birds will not be collected, reporting them allows the District and State authorities to monitor the progression of WNV. Unless directed otherwise by the State, follow the protocol below to safely dispose of the bird. There has been no evidence that humans can contract WNV from handling dead birds, but birds may carry other diseases, so do not touch dead birds.

San Joaquin County Mosquito & Vector Control District is dedicated to the monitoring of WNV and the control of the mosquitoes that carry the disease. The District's field personnel will be collecting dead birds they find during their routine work. These birds will be tested at the District's laboratory and then sent to the State for confirmatory testing for the presence of WNV.

Proper handling of dead birds:

The birds can be safely disposed of by following these simple steps: **1)** use a glove, shovel or a plastic bag that has been turned inside out over the hand to pick up the bird; **2)** put the bird in a plastic bag and tie, **3)** dispose of the bagged bird in a regular garbage container for routine street-side pick up.

* Sources of this information were taken from the California Department of Health Service's web site @ westnile.ca.gov/facts.htm and from the Department of Health & Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's web site @ cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/q&a.htm