



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



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To: All Media

From: Santa Cruz County Mosquito and Vector Control

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WEST NILE VIRUS RISK - HORSE INFECTED

MOSQUITOES AND BIRDS ALSO CAN CARRY VIRUS

WATSONVILLE, CALIFORNIA - - The California Department of Food and Agriculture earlier this week announced confirmation of a case of West Nile virus in a horse east of Watsonville. West Nile is a bird virus spread by mosquitoes that can also infect people and animals. This is the first indication of West Nile virus in Santa Cruz County this year.

This has been expected, although in most years the virus is detected first in dead birds in the summer. The unvaccinated horse is recovering, and Santa Cruz County Mosquito and Vector Control is monitoring and controlling mosquitoes in the area and throughout the County, and mosquito counts are decreasing.

"We urge everyone to reduce the risk by emptying standing water in your yard and to wear mosquito repellent when outdoors at dawn or dusk. Although the current risk is low, the disease can be life changing; these simple precautions can protect you from serious illness," said Paul Binding, mosquito control manager for the County.

Horses are a dead-end host for WNV, meaning they cannot infect people or other animals. Mosquitoes become infected after feeding on birds that have high levels of the virus in the blood. The mosquitoes then pass the virus onto horses, people, birds or other animals while feeding on them.

Not every horse exposed to the virus will develop WNV. Of the horses that do develop clinical signs, approximately 30 percent will succumb to the disease. Signs of the disease in horses include stumbling, staggering, wobbling, weakness, muscle twitching or inability to stand. A veterinarian should be consulted if a horse is exhibiting these signs.

Vaccinations for horses are available. Horse owners should contact a veterinarian to discuss this preventive measure, especially in counties where there is known WNV infection. The timing of the vaccine is critical because it must be administered prior to disease exposure.

Residents are urged to report dead birds to the West Nile Virus state hotline: 1-877-968-2473. Reports may also be made online at www.westnile.ca.gov. Dead bird reports are an important tool for West Nile virus detection and to determine the location of higher risk areas.

Residents are also urged to help reduce their risk by following these guidelines:

- **Dump** or **drain** standing water. Mosquito can't begin their life without water.
- **Defend** yourself against mosquitoes using repellents containing DEET, Picaridin, or Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus.
- Wear long sleeves and long pants when mosquitoes are present, typically **Dawn** and **Dusk**.
- **Report neglected swimming pools** by calling 831-454-2590 or visiting www.agdept.com/mvc.html . Just one neglected pool can produce more than **1 million** mosquitoes and affect people up to **five miles** away.

To date, there have been no human cases reported of West Nile virus in Santa Cruz County, although the disease has sickened 123 people in California this year. While West Nile virus can cause fever and sometimes neurological symptoms, studies have shown that the majority of cases go undiagnosed and unreported. Mild cases can involve fever, headache, tiredness, body aches, and swollen lymph glands.

Call the Mosquito and Vector Control program to report mosquito problems at (831) 454-2590 or to get FREE mosquitofish for ornamental ponds, horse troughs or neglected swimming pools.

For information concerning human West Nile virus symptoms, prevention, or testing, please call the Santa Cruz County Health Services department at (831) 454-4114 or visit the State website: <http://www.westnile.ca.gov/>. For information concerning West Nile virus and horses, please call the California Department of Food and Agriculture Animal Health Branch at (916) 654-1447.