



News Release

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

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STATE HEALTH DIRECTOR ANNOUNCES PROBABLE CASE OF WEST NILE VIRUS

SACRAMENTO - A Los Angeles County woman is being evaluated as a probable case of West Nile virus, State Health Director Diana M. Bontá, R.N., Dr.P.H., announced today. If confirmed, the woman would be the first reported case of West Nile virus in California. The woman has fully recovered and resumed her normal activities.

"We have been anticipating the arrival of West Nile virus in California as reports of the disease have progressed steadily westward across the United States," Bontá said. "Although we have no other evidence that the virus has arrived, mosquito surveillance and control efforts are being increased."

West Nile virus is typically spread to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. State and local public health officials have been conducting an expanded surveillance program for West Nile virus since 2000, searching for evidence of infection in people, mosquitoes, birds and other animals.

The woman became ill on Aug. 10 and was hospitalized on Aug. 12. She was diagnosed with aseptic meningitis. Although she reports no mosquito bites, blood transfusions or organ transplants, or travel to areas where West Nile virus has been confirmed, laboratory tests indicate that she has been exposed to West Nile virus. However, tests of mosquitoes, chickens and dead birds have shown no evidence of the virus in California. Health officials continue to investigate the circumstances of this case.

The virus, which can cause encephalitis, was first detected in the United States in New York in 1999 and has been found in 42 states and the District of Columbia. Most individuals who are infected with West Nile virus have only mild symptoms such as fever, headache and body aches. However, the virus can cause severe symptoms in the elderly and individuals with lowered immune systems.

Bontá emphasized that the risk of any individual becoming ill from the bite of a mosquito infected with West Nile virus is very low. Less than 1 percent of the bites from infected mosquitoes can cause severe disease. The risk of disease is higher for individuals 50 years of age and older.

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In response to the investigation, local mosquito and vector control agencies are intensifying mosquito control activities. Individuals can further reduce their risk of mosquito-borne diseases by taking these precautions:

- Avoid activity outside when mosquitoes are most active, especially at dawn and dusk.
- When outdoors, wear long pants, long sleeve shirts and other protective clothing.
- Apply insect repellent according to label instructions.
- 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.

Many species of birds get infected and die from West Nile virus. Bontá asked the public to become part of the California Department of Health Services' (CDHS) extensive monitoring effort for the virus by reporting any crows, ravens, magpies and jays that have been dead for less than 24 hours. CDHS has established a toll-free line - 877-WNV-BIRD - for public reporting.

Additional information about West Nile virus in California can be found at <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/>