

**Press Release**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**HEADLINE: Emerging Diseases... Are we Prepared?**

**BODY:**

An outbreak of encephalitis caused by West Nile virus (WNV) in New York City during the summer of 1999 sent a wakeup call to public health officials throughout the nation. This virus had never before been detected in the Western Hemisphere. In three short years, WNV has spread throughout 27 states, the District of Columbia, the Cayman Islands, and into portions of Canada. To date, there have been nearly 150 human cases and 18 deaths reported. As only an estimated 1 in 1000 individuals infected with WNV show symptoms, actual transmission of WNV to humans has been significant.

Similar to other vector-borne encephalitis viruses (a vector is an insect or animal capable of transmitting disease), WNV is transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito. WNV is maintained in wild bird populations and mosquitoes acquire the virus after feeding on the blood of infected birds. Crows appear to be the most affected by WNV with mortality rates approaching 80%.

Although WNV has not been detected in California, its rapid spread westward has prompted health officials and mosquito & vector control districts statewide to initiate surveillance for WNV. Beginning in 2000, the California Department of Health Services initiated a WNV surveillance program in coordination with various federal, state, and local agencies. The San Gabriel Valley Mosquito & Vector Control District is participating in this endeavor by adding WNV surveillance to its already established mosquito-borne encephalitis surveillance program.

St. Louis encephalitis (SLE) and Western equine encephalomyelitis (WEE) are also caused by viruses that are transmitted by mosquitoes and carried by birds. These viruses are present continuously in Los Angeles County and are monitored on an ongoing basis. Since there is no vaccine and no cure, controlling the mosquito population is the best preventative measure available.

The threat of both new and existing public health concerns prompts the San Gabriel Valley Mosquito & Vector Control District to reiterate the services we provide to our residents:

**Surveillance for mosquito and other vector-borne diseases** through ongoing testing and monitoring. Sentinel chickens are strategically placed throughout the District and tested every 10 days for virus activity. Mosquito populations are monitored and samples submitted for testing. Residents can assist with the State's WNV surveillance program by reporting birds that have been dead no more than 24 hours (especially crows, ravens, and jays) to (877) WNV-BIRD (877-968-2473) or through <http://westnile.ca.gov>.

**Control of mosquitoes and other vectors** by reducing the number of breeding sites available and controlling populations of vectors, as necessary, with highly selective products designed to preserve the integrity of natural systems while reducing the threat of vector-borne disease. To report mosquito problems or improperly maintained (green) pools where mosquitoes can breed, contact the District directly at (626) 814-9466.

**Africanized honey bee program** geared towards educating residents and preventing serious stinging incidents. As we value the benefit of honey bees in the agriculture industry and in our own backyards, swarms of bees (traveling bees without an established nest) are given an opportunity to disperse naturally. An established nest of honey bees can be dangerous if disturbed. We will remove nests located in vegetation on both public and private property. Africanized honey bees are now well established in Southern California. Living responsibly with these beneficial insects is our only option.

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**Rodent control program** that educates residents on how to eliminate food and nest sites and discourage re-infestations. The District can then assist residents in removing rodents from their property. Rodents and their fleas can transmit a number of diseases. To reduce these risks, wild animals should be discouraged from entering residential property.

**Educational outreach** designed to inform the public about vector-transmitted diseases, of their role in controlling mosquitoes and other vectors, and the services our District provides in the San Gabriel Valley.

Routine travel, international trade, and Mother Nature herself provide ample opportunities for an increasing number of vector-borne problems to establish or reintroduce themselves in the San Gabriel Valley. An active vector control program is our first line of defense.

**Please contact the District if you have any questions or would like to place a request for service:**

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