

Press Release

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DATE: April 1, 2004

HEADLINE: West Nile Virus Resurfaces in San Gabriel Valley

WEST COVINA – The San Gabriel Valley Mosquito & Vector Control District was notified today by the California Department of Health Services that a crow submitted to the Department's Dead Bird Surveillance Program on February 24th from the city of San Gabriel, CA was infected with West Nile virus (WNV). This is the first confirmation that the virus is present in Los Angeles County this year.

Yesterday, the Orange County Vector Control District reported that blood samples taken on March 2, 2004 from two house finches from the city of Fullerton tested positive for antibodies to West Nile virus.

This presents evidence that WNV may behave differently than the viruses that are already present in our District. It indicates that transmission was occurring as far back as February when the weather was still quite cool. "This is significant" said Steve West, District Manager. "Normally, virus transmission does not appear until late summer or early fall." Several other states have already documented WNV activity this year, worrying experts. "Early season transmission in wild birds raises concern that both humans and horses may be at increased risk this year" noted Kenn Fujioka, Assistant Manager for the San Gabriel Valley Mosquito & Vector Control District.

West Nile virus is a mosquito-transmitted virus passed primarily between birds by mosquitoes. Humans, horses, and other animals can become infected with WNV if bitten by an infected mosquito. Although most people exhibit no symptoms, the elderly and individuals with suppressed immune symptoms are at greatest risk for more serious, and potentially life threatening illness.

Last year, nearly 10,000 humans were infected and 264 died nationwide from WNV with the first human illness occurring in late March. Typically, infection in wild birds precedes infections in humans by only a few weeks. It is therefore critical that residents take precautions NOW to protect themselves from mosquito bites and take measures to eliminate mosquito breeding around their homes:

- Avoid outdoor activity when mosquitoes are most active – from dusk until dawn.
- If outdoors, wear protective clothing and apply mosquito repellants according to label directions – those containing DEET have been proven to be the most effective.
- Ensure door and window screens are secured and in good repair to prevent mosquito entrance into homes.
- Eliminate standing and stagnant water. Eggs are laid and immature mosquitoes develop in dirty pools & spas, ponds, bird baths, buckets, barrels, children's toys etc. Immature mosquitoes become biting adults in 5-7 days.
- Free mosquito-eating fish are available for permanent water sources (ponds, troughs, large fountains) at mosquito & vector control districts.
- Contact the district immediately to report mosquito problems or green pools/spas.

In coordination with State and local agencies, the District employs an integrated mosquito management approach focusing on disease surveillance, vector control, and public outreach to reduce mosquito populations and minimize the risk of mosquito-transmitted disease. This proactive approach, although inherently more difficult, provides the most effective and environmentally sound mosquito control possible in our urban environments.

Dead birds serve as early warning sentinels that virus is being transmitted. Residents are urged to assist our District and the State by reporting dead bird sightings to the WNV hotline by calling **1-877-WNV-BIRD (968-2473)**. Additional information or requests for service can be obtained at www.sgvmosquito.org or **(626) 814-9466**. The District provides mosquito and other vector control services as a public service to residents in the San Gabriel Valley. Funding is secured through an annual benefit assessment; therefore, residents will not be charged for our assistance.

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