

2012 AGGRESSIVE WEST NILE VIRUS SEASON

Virus surpasses activity pace to date nationally and locally

By Nola Woods, CCMVCD Community Affairs Representative

This year's West Nile virus outbreak is the most aggressive since the mosquito-borne illness was first discovered in the United States in 1999, and the most serious West Nile virus outbreak the nation has ever seen. As of the publication of this article, 87 people have died of West Nile virus nationwide and more than 1990 people have been infected. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), 1069 of the infections thus far are of the serious form of West Nile virus known as neuroinvasive because it results in swelling of the brain and spinal cord. The hard hit part of the country is the Dallas/Fort Worth area of Texas. In Texas, 888 people have been diagnosed with West Nile virus so far this year, and the West Nile virus season has not yet reached its traditional end.

In Contra Costa County, West Nile Virus infections in [mosquitoes, birds, and chickens](#) are dramatically exceeding last year's year-to-date totals. That has turned an already busy West Nile virus season into a challenging season for the employees of the Contra Costa Mosquito & Vector Control District.

The bulk of the WNV activity is in eastern Contra Costa County with all of the samples of mosquitoes that have tested positive and more than half of the positive birds coming from Brentwood, Antioch, Oakley, Knightsen, and Discovery Bay. Brentwood is the hardest hit among these cities as all but one of the mosquito samples has come from the same area of the city. That has prompted the District to focus efforts on specific areas at highest risk.

District employees recently canvassed small areas in Brentwood and Antioch, going door to door on a Saturday, in search of residents at home to allow backyard inspections. Not only was the effort successful in increasing the total number of neighborhood inspections, it proved compelling when in three separate cases residents said they did not have any mosquito production on their properties, yet when District employees took a look around, in all three cases, they found mosquitoes so numerous, inspectors estimated the combined locations were producing upwards of one million mosquitoes. This illustrates the importance of having every resident walk around their property at least once every five days to ensure there are not mosquito sources in back or front yards. The mosquitoes that can transmit West Nile virus need only a couple tablespoons of water in which to lay up to 400 eggs at a time. Backyards are a primary location for these mosquitoes.

The other common location for mosquitoes capable of transmitting West Nile virus is in underground water, such as water found in catch basins under curbside gutters. That is why District employees are inspecting and treating as many of these as possible, using [larvicide](#) to prevent young larval mosquitoes from developing into biting adults.

Since adult mosquitoes have tested positive for West Nile virus, humans are at risk of possible infection. That is why the District has conducted fogging using public health pesticides in order to kill adult mosquitoes in areas where they are found to be infected. Residents can receive timely [email notifications](#) by signing up at www.ContraCostaMosquito.com.

Eastern Contra Costa County isn't the only place where West Nile virus can be found. Dead birds have tested positive for West Nile virus from Martinez, Pleasant Hill, Walnut Creek, and El Sobrante as well. That has District employees searching for mosquito sources from one end of the county to the other. And it is exactly why the public's help is so important.

Dump out any amounts of standing water to eliminate mosquito sources. This includes paying close attention to how much water is used for sprinkler systems. Over-watering yards and other vegetation

forces runoff into catch basins and storm drains where the water accumulates and attracts mosquitoes that can transmit WNV. Carefully monitoring outdoor irrigation amounts is an important step to reducing the risk of WNV.

Reporting neglected swimming pools and spas is also key to preventing WNV because one neglected swimming pool can produce more than 1 million mosquitoes and can affect people as far as five miles away. Residents who see neglected or green pools or hot tubs should [report the pool to the District](#) online or call the District at [925-771-6183](tel:925-771-6183). Anonymous calls are accepted.

If you have to be out at times when mosquitoes are present, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) recommend repellents featuring the active ingredients DEET, Picaridin, or Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus to prevent mosquito bites. Wearing clothing with long sleeves and pants can also help reduce the amount of exposed skin that could be bitten.

West Nile Virus season typically lasts into September and possibly October, depending on how quickly the weather cools in the fall. That means there are many more weeks ahead when vigilance is vital. If we all work together to prevent mosquitoes, we make an important effort to keep our families and neighbors healthy from West Nile Virus. The Contra Costa Mosquito & Vector Control District has been protecting public health since 1927 precisely because mosquito control matters.

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