Los Angeles County West Vector & Vector-Borne Disease Control District
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West Nile Virus
Public Health Update & Advisory

March 4, 2013

First WNV Positive Dead Bird in California for 2013 is found in Lomita

This is the first West Nile virus (WNV) public health advisory for 2013. A dead American Crow from the City of Lomita has tested positive for WNV. This is the first positive dead bird for WNV in California for 2013.

What does it mean?

This early positive may be an indicator that WNV in Los Angeles County and California for 2013 is off to the same high activity found in 2012.

There were 479 human cases and 19 deaths in California for 2012. These were the highest numbers recorded since 2005 when there were 805 human cases and 19 deaths. Los Angeles County recorded 174 human cases with 6 fatalities for 2012. These were the highest numbers recorded since 2004 (309 human cases and 13 deaths) when WNV first appeared in California. Nationally for 2012, 48 states reported West Nile virus infections in people, birds, or mosquitoes with a total of 5,387 human cases, including 243 deaths making it the most active season since 2003. WNV is endemic throughout Los Angeles County, California and the United States.

During the hotter summer months, mosquitoes can go from an egg to an adult in only 7 days. Since female mosquitoes can produce up to 200 female eggs at a time, a single female mosquito can produce over 8 million adult biting mosquitoes in only 3 weeks. During the cooler winter months, the mosquito breeding cycle slows and can take as long as 3-4 weeks to go from an egg to an adult, but can still transmit WNV. With the transition from winter to spring, warmer days are sporadically mixed with rainy days. This combination can produce unexpected mosquito breeding well before the hotter days of summer.

A wide variety of wild birds, including the American crow, are the reservoir for West Nile virus. Mosquitoes become infected when they first bite an infected bird and then transfer the virus to other birds and humans as they bite again. The virus is more active (virulent) in wild birds when the weather is hotter and conversely less active in birds during cooler weather.

With respect to positive indicators (dead birds, sentinels chicken flocks, mosquitoes, and dead squirrels), 80%-90% are dead birds. Birds routinely travel many miles from their nighttime nesting locations to feed and scavenger (especially American Crows) during the day before they return to their original location in the evening. Although positive birds collected in a specific area are significant with respect to trends on a wider basis, it does not definitively identify a specific city, zip code, or location as the site where the actual mosquito bite and infection occurred because of the
bird’s extended daily travel patterns. A bird may travel and/or die as much as 1 to 10 miles away from the location where it was originally infected.

A positive result from sentinel chicken flocks and/or trapped adult mosquitoes are more specific with respect to the actual site of the infection, whereas positive dead birds are less specific with respect to the actual location of the infection.

**What should the city/county do?**

There is no specific action that is required by a city and/or county. However, the District recommends that the city/county make this information known to their residents through their normal communication process so people walking or sitting outside at dawn, dust, or anytime during the night will take the appropriate precautions listed below to protect themselves from being bitten by infected mosquitoes.

**Residents can protect themselves from WNV infections by doing the following:**

- **DEET** - Apply insect repellent according to the label. Repellents containing DEET, picaradin, IR3535, and oil of lemon eucalyptus are the longest lasting and most effective. Repellents keep the mosquitoes from biting you.

- **DAWN AND DUSK** - Mosquitoes that carry WNV primarily bite in the early morning and evening so it is important to wear repellent at this time.

- **MOSQUITO PROOF YOUR HOME** - Make sure that your doors and windows have tight-fitting screens to keep out mosquitoes. Repair or replace screens with tears or holes.

- **DRAIN** - Mosquitoes lay their eggs on standing water. Eliminate all sources of standing water on your property, including flowerpots, old car tires, rain gutters and pet bowls. Ensure that swimming pools, spas, and ponds are properly maintained. If you have an ornamental pond, use mosquito fish. You can make arrangements to pick up free mosquito fish at the District by calling 310-915-7370.

**Reporting & Picking Up Dead Birds: 1-877-WNV BIRD (1-877-968-2473):**

The public is encouraged to report dead birds to help with West Nile virus surveillance and control efforts. Dead birds should be reported to the toll-free hotline number at 1-877-WNV BIRD (1-877-968-2473). Dead birds must be less than 24 hours old to be able to test them for West Nile virus. If the bird is rigid or decomposed, it cannot be used for testing.

**Disposal of Dead Birds:**

**General Disposal:** Birds that are not in a condition to be tested can be disposed of in your normal weekly trash by taking the following steps:

1) Take a plastic garbage bag and insert your hand in the open end;
2) Grab the dead bird and pull it into the garbage bag using an “outside-to-inside” pulling motion;
3) Tie off the bag with the bird inside and place it in your regular trash for disposal.

**Animal Control or Your City:** As an alternative to the above, you can call Animal Control or contact your city to see if they have a program to disposal of dead birds.
District: Please note that the District does not pick up or disposed of dead birds that are not collected for testing.

**Symptoms of West Nile virus:**

People infected with WNV can experience a variety of symptoms that may include: no symptoms, West Nile Fever, or West Nile Neuroinvasive disease. Symptoms usually occur 2-15 days after infection. If you suspect you have contracted WNV, consult your physician for testing and care.

**Symptoms of “West Nile Fever” can include:**
- Headaches
- High fever
- Tiredness and body aches
- Skin rash and swollen lymph glands
  (These symptoms may last from several days to several weeks)

**Symptoms of “West Nile Neuroinvasive Disease” can include:**
- Severe Headache
- High Fever
- Stiff neck
- Stupor
- Disorientation
- Tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness
- Paralysis
- Coma

**For mosquito problems or to pick up mosquito fish:** Call 1-310-915-7370 Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

**For additional information on WNV and the Los Angeles County West Vector & Vector-Borne Disease Control District:** Please visit the District’s website at [www.lawestvector.org](http://www.lawestvector.org) for all WNV results and updates.

**Questions:** If you have any questions, please contact Robert Saviskas, Executive Director, at (310) 915-7370 ext. 223 or at rsaviskas@lawestvector.org.