



# Press Release

SANTA BARBARA COASTAL VECTOR CONTROL DISTRICT

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## NINE MORE DEAD BIRDS FROM GOLETA TEST POSITIVE FOR WEST NILE VIRUS

Nine more dead birds, all of them American Crows from Goleta, have tested positive for West Nile Virus (WNV). Along with the two positive dead birds found earlier this month, this brings Santa Barbara County's total to 11 positive dead birds for 2005 to date. In 2004, only 7 dead birds from Santa Barbara County tested positive for WNV during the entire year, with the first one not being found until late July.

It was to be expected that the Goleta Valley would be the *first* area of Santa Barbara County to have high levels of WNV. Goleta has many acres of wetlands including marshes, sloughs, estuaries, lakes, and ponds which provide extensive breeding habitat for the mosquitoes that transmit WNV as well as serving as a home for many species of birds that are the reservoir of the disease. "The District has intensified its abatement and surveillance efforts in the Goleta area in anticipation of its arrival this year," said Mitch Bernstein, District Manager. However, it must be emphasized that mosquitoes and birds occur in all areas of Santa Barbara County. Mosquitoes and mosquito-borne diseases do not respect political boundaries or property lines. **All areas of Santa Barbara County should be presumed to be at risk for West Nile Virus.**

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 systems are at greatest risk for more serious, and potentially life threatening illness.

In California, for 2005 to date, West Nile Virus has been detected in at least 34 of the 58 counties. There has been one human case (Tulare County) so far in 2005 along with 3 confirmed horse cases, sentinel chickens in 3 counties, live mosquitoes in 10 counties, and 258 dead birds. The dead birds have been the only WNV activity detected in Santa Barbara County so far.

In 2004, West Nile Virus was confirmed in all 58 California counties. There were 828 human cases (27 fatal), 536 horse cases (about half fatal), and 3,232 positive dead birds. Most of the affected horses were unvaccinated or the vaccinations were not up to date.

Nationwide in 2003, nearly 10,000 humans were infected and 264 died from West Nile Virus. 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 to South County residents for permanent water sources (ponds, troughs, large fountains) at the Santa Barbara Coastal Vector Control District.
- Horse owners should contact their veterinarian to have their horses vaccinated for West Nile Virus and to keep the vaccinations up to date.
- Contact the Santa Barbara Coastal Vector Control District immediately at (805) 969-5050 to report mosquito problems or green pools/spas.

In coordination with State Department of Health Services and the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department, 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. The Vector Control District maintains 6 sentinel chicken flocks at strategic locations in the county and also conducts trapping surveys for live mosquitoes at many locations countywide, in addition to retrieving dead birds for West Nile Virus testing. Not all portions of Santa Barbara County receive mosquito abatement. The Vector Control District provides full, organized mosquito control only in urban areas of the South County. 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 the 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 (877-968-2473)** or online at **[www.westnile.ca.gov](http://www.westnile.ca.gov)**. Additional information or requests for service can be obtained from the Santa Barbara Coastal Vector Control District at [www.sbcvcd.org](http://www.sbcvcd.org) or **(805) 969-5050**. The Santa Barbara Coastal Vector Control District will accept reports of standing water and possible mosquito breeding sources in Santa Barbara County.