



Press Release

SANTA BARBARA COASTAL VECTOR CONTROL DISTRICT

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CONTACT: Mitchell Bernstein, District Manager **Telephone:** (805) 969-5050 ext. 222

DEAD BIRDS POSITIVE FOR WEST NILE VIRUS FOUND IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

First in 2005

Two dead birds from Santa Barbara County have tested positive for West Nile Virus (WNV). This is the first time West Nile Virus activity has been detected in Santa Barbara County for 2005. The first bird, an American Crow, was found in Carpinteria on June 2, 2005. The second bird, also an American Crow, was found near El Colegio Road, Isla Vista on June 7, 2005. These dead bird finds are approximately 6 weeks earlier in the season compared to previous West Nile Virus positive dead bird finds from Santa Barbara County in 2004. This indicates the possibility that higher levels of West Nile Virus activity may be present locally during 2005 than in 2004. A total of 7 West Nile Virus positive dead birds were found in Santa Barbara County in 2004.

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.

In California, for 2005 to date, West Nile Virus has been detected in at least 27 of the 58 counties. There have been no human cases so far in 2005; however there have been two confirmed horse cases, along with sentinel chickens in two counties, live mosquitoes in 3 counties, and 121 dead birds.

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)**. Additional information or requests for service can be obtained from the Santa Barbara Coastal Vector Control District at 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.