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Release # 2014-03

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2014 Warm Winter Brings Early Mosquito Season and West Nile Virus to the Area *County Health Official Recommends Actions to Protect Against Mosquito Bites and West Nile Virus*

(Stockton, CA – March 21, 2014) The recent finding of a dead bird that tested positive for West Nile Virus (WNV) is an indication that the WNV season is starting earlier than usual in San Joaquin County. “It is time for everyone to take precautions against the dangers of West Nile Virus (WNV),” urges Dr. Alvaro Garza, San Joaquin County Public Health Officer.

Warm and wet weather promotes the breeding of mosquitoes. Mosquitoes become infected with WNV when they feed on birds that harbor the virus. West Nile Virus is transmitted to humans and animals through the bite of a mosquito carrying the virus. No cases of human WNV illness have been reported in California to date.

“While we can’t make projections about the severity of West Nile Virus this season, residents should begin taking steps to protect themselves from mosquito bites by eliminating all sources of standing water that can support mosquito breeding and by applying insect repellent containing DEET,” says Dr. Garza.

Experts refer to the “four Ds” as the most effective ways to prevent WNV:

1. **DRAIN** – Mosquitoes lay their eggs on standing water. Eliminate all sources of standing water on your property, including flower pots, old tires, rain gutters and bird baths. If you have a pond, use mosquitofish or commercially available products to eliminate mosquito larvae. Neglected swimming pools are also prime habitat for mosquito development. The San Joaquin County Mosquito and Vector Control District continues to take action to reduce mosquito populations in the area and is available to help with neglected pools and the prevention of mosquito development. To request District service, call 209-982-4675, 1-800-300-4675 or visit the District website at www.sjmosquito.org.
2. **DEET** – Apply insect repellent containing DEET, picaradin, oil of lemon eucalyptus or IR 3535 according to label instructions. Apply repellent only to exposed skin and/or clothing. DEET can be used safely on infants and children two months of age and older (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/repellentupdates.htm>).
3. **DAWN AND DUSK** – Mosquitoes that carry WNV tend to bite in the early morning and evening hours, so it is important to wear repellent when outdoors. Make sure that your doors and windows have tight-fitting screens to keep out mosquitoes. Repair or replace screens with tears or holes.
4. **DRESS** – Wear clothing that reduces the risk of skin exposure (i.e., long pants and long-sleeved shirts).

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Most individuals who are infected with WNV will not experience any illness. About one in five people infected with WNV will develop West Nile Fever with symptoms of headache, fever and fatigue. However, some individuals -- less than 1 percent -- will develop serious neurologic illness such as encephalitis or meningitis. Older adults and those with compromised immune systems have the highest risk of becoming ill and developing severe complications. In 2013, San Joaquin County had one resident that died due to complications from West Nile virus infection.

For more information about West Nile virus, visit the San Joaquin County Public Health Services website, www.sjcphs.org or the California Department of Public Health website, www.westnile.ca.gov. Residents are encouraged to report dead birds on the state website or by calling toll-free 877-WNV-BIRD (877-968-2473).

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