



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WEST NILE VIRUS DETECTED LOCALLY EARLIER THAN EVER BEFORE *County Says Last Year's Infection Rates Show Residents Over 50 at Greatest Risk*

County Vector Control officials have confirmed that West Nile virus has been detected in San Diego County earlier than ever before. In January, the virus was first confirmed in a red-shouldered hawk collected in Escondido. Since that time, three hawks, one crow and one owl in Poway, Fallbrook, Santee, Bay Ho, and Ramona have also tested positive, bringing this year's total to six birds.

"While there have been no deaths from West Nile virus in San Diego County, 14 of the 15 locally acquired human cases last year were in people over the age of 50," said Gary Erbeck, Director of the Department of Environmental Health. "People over 50 and individuals with compromised immune systems are at risk of developing more serious symptoms, such as meningitis or encephalitis."

This early season indicates that mosquitoes are surviving the winter months and continue to spread the infection. A wet winter and warm spring has created ideal mosquito breeding conditions, which could mean that West Nile virus activity may increase this year.

To protect yourself:

- Eliminate all standing water sources on your property, including leaky hose faucets and irrigation pipes, children's pools and toys, plant saucers, old tires, rain collection barrels, uncovered boats, and sagging tarps. Mosquitoes can breed even in small amounts of water.
- Protect yourself from mosquito bites by wearing long sleeves and pants when outdoors, and stay indoors when mosquitoes are most active, especially at dawn and dusk.
- You should use an insect repellent containing DEET, Picaridin or Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus on exposed skin and clothing and keep door and window screens closed and in good repair.
- Report birds that have been dead for less than 24 hours, are intact, and are not covered with ants or flies by calling Vector Control at 888-551-INFO. Dead birds may be an indication that the virus is active in the area. Mosquitoes that feed on infected birds become carriers and can pass the virus to humans.

For more information, call the County's West Nile virus information line at 1-888-551-INFO (4636) or visit www.SDFighttheBite.com.

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