



**Antelope Valley Mosquito
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NEWS RELEASE

– For Immediate Release

May 27, 2004

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Got mosquitoes? – Get rid of standing water and West Nile Virus!

Memorial Day Weekend is the official start of BBQ and pool season and people all over are enjoying the nice warm evenings outdoors. That is, until they hear the annoying sound of mosquitoes buzzing in their ears. Then the swatting starts – first with bare hands, then fly swatters and next maybe a bug zapper. Some will start a chemical warfare on these pesky little insects and get every single bug spray out and drench the entire backyard, until the only things left, are a few red splatters on the wall and a some coughing people on the ground. Ahh, the sweet scent of summer...

Unfortunately mosquitoes are not only a pesky nuisance that spoil a nice evening sitting outside, but they can transmit diseases like West Nile Virus (WNV), Western Equine and St. Louis Encephalitis. “Since March over 50 dead birds from Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura Counties have tested positive for WNV,” says Karen Mellor, Entomologist at the Antelope Valley Mosquito & Vector Control District (AVMVCD). “Last week Vector Control Districts in Riverside, San Bernardino and Los Angeles Counties also found mosquitoes that carried the virus. And the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported the first human case for 2004 in New Mexico today. This shows that this year’s season is starting earlier than expected.”

The virus is spread by mosquitoes, which feed on the blood of infected birds and then pass it on to humans or other animals. West Nile Virus is not spread by person-to-person contact or by handling dead birds. The dead bird surveillance is an early warning system for the range of the virus. The public is asked to help by reporting recently deceased crows and ravens by calling 1-877-WNV-BIRD. Use gloves, a shovel or an inverted trash bag to pick up any dead bird.

The chance that any one person is going to become ill from a single mosquito bite remains low. The risk of severe illness and death is highest for people over 50 years old, although people of all ages can become ill. About 80 percent of the people who become infected will show no symptoms at all. The milder form of the infection can include fever, headache, and body aches, and can last for as short as a few days, to several weeks. About one in 150 people infected with WNV will develop severe illness. The severe symptoms can include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, coma, and paralysis. These symptoms may last several weeks, and neurological effects may be permanent.

“Since WNV was found in a dead raven in Pearblossom at the end of last years mosquito season, it’s even more important to keep mosquitoes at bay and everybody needs to do their share to reduce the number of humans and horses affected in the Antelope Valley,” says District Manager Cei Kratz.

Most people do not think of mosquitoes when they talk about the desert, but with more people moving into this area and the increase of lush green yards and backyard pools, the potential mosquito breeding sites multiply dramatically. In fact, a discarded soda can that accumulates water from a sprinkler or a dripping faucet can produce 200-300 mosquitoes within a week or two.

The technicians of the AVMVCD are working hard at reducing mosquitoes in roadside ditches and curbs, retention basins and other breeding sources we know of, but the big “unknown frontiers” are backyard sources that we are unaware of. This is where every resident is asked to contribute to the program to keep our community healthy.

Here are a few easy suggestions to reduce mosquitoes in your yard and your neighborhood:

- * Get rid of standing water – That’s where immature mosquitoes live. Empty out all small containers at least once a week, keep pools and spas chlorinated or drained, repair all water leaks and avoid over-watering. Anything that holds water longer than a week is a potential mosquito producer.
- * Get mosquito-eating fish (*Gambusia affinis*) for free, if you have sources that cannot be drained (e.g. fish ponds, pools, large horse troughs).
- * Wear long sleeved shirts and pants and use mosquito repellent containing DEET when outdoors during dusk and dawn. Always follow instructions on the product label.
- * Keep tight fitting screens on doors and windows to prevent mosquitoes from entering homes.
- * Horse owners should also make sure their horses are properly vaccinated, to avoid losing them to WNV.
- * Report stagnant pools and other backyard sources to the AVMVCD, so they can treat the mosquito breeding sources accordingly.

For any further questions or services please feel free to contact the Antelope Valley Mosquito & Vector Control District by phone (661-942-2917) or check us out online at www.avmosquito.org.