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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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First Confirmed Case Of West Nile Virus In Los Angeles County

Lancaster – The Antelope Valley Mosquito & Vector Control District has received confirmation of the first case of West Nile virus infection in California, Karen S. Mellor, District Entomologist, announced today. Laboratory tests conducted at the University of California at Davis ruled out the possibility of infection by closely related viruses, such as St. Louis encephalitis.

The Los Angeles County woman, who was hospitalized on August 12 with aseptic meningitis, was released 4 days later and has since fully recovered. Although she reports no mosquito bites or travel to areas where West Nile virus has been confirmed, laboratory tests indicate that she has been exposed to West Nile virus. Health officials continue to investigate the circumstances of this case.

"West Nile virus is typically spread to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito," Mellor said. "We have to assume that the woman was bitten by a mosquito, even though she doesn't recall any bites. It is a very unusual case, since more than 50 Vector Control Districts and other agencies in California have been monitoring sentinel chickens, mosquitoes, birds and other animals for two years without any signs of West Nile virus."

West Nile Virus can cause a non-specific febrile illness, aseptic meningitis or encephalitis in humans but most infections are without any symptoms. Less than 1% of those infected develop severe illness. As of September 13, 2002, CDC has reported 1438 human cases of WNV and 64 deaths in 30 states and the District of Columbia. Most individuals who are infected with West Nile virus have only mild symptoms such as fever, headache and body aches. However, the virus can cause severe symptoms in persons over 50 years of age and individuals with lowered immune systems.

"We have been expecting West Nile virus in California as reports of the disease have progressed steadily westward across the United States," Mellor said. "Although we have no other evidence that the virus has arrived, mosquito surveillance and control efforts are being enhanced."

Individuals can further reduce their risk of mosquito-borne diseases by taking the following precautions:

- Avoid activity outside when mosquitoes are most active, especially at dawn and dusk.
- Eliminate all sources of standing water that can support mosquito breeding.
- Drain and clean birdbaths, wading pools, water troughs etc. at least once a week.
- Make sure that doors and windows have tight fitting screens. Repair or replace screens that have tears or holes.
- When outdoors, wear long pants, long sleeve shirts and other protective clothing.
- Apply insect repellent according to label instructions.
- Call your local Mosquito & Vector Control District to report stagnant water sources (e.g. neglected pools).

Many species of birds get infected and die from West Nile virus. The public can become part of the California Department of Health Services' (CDHS) extensive monitoring effort for the virus by reporting any crows, ravens, magpies and jays that have been dead for less than 24 hours. CDHS has established two toll-free lines – 877-WNV-BIRD – for dead bird reporting, and 866-847-2246 – for general information on West Nile virus.

Additional information about West Nile virus in California can be found at <http://westnile.ca.gov/> or <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/>.

For further information please contact the Antelope Valley Mosquito & Vector Control District at (661) 942-2917. Our services, literature, and educational presentations are available at no charge to our residents.