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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WEST NILE VIRUS HAS ARRIVED IN CALIFORNIA

Lancaster – The Antelope Valley Mosquito & Vector Control District has received confirmation of West Nile virus (WNV) infection in California, Karen 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 (SLE).

Todd Walker, Ph.D., Senior Public Health Biologist of the Vector-borne Disease Section of the Department of Health Services reported today that one mosquito pool collected on 8/5/03 in Imperial County near the Salton Sea has tested positive for West Nile Virus. Nearby flocks of sentinel chickens are currently being tested for West Nile Virus and St. Louis Encephalitis, and will likely turn up positive for WNV based on preliminary tests.

The testing of sentinel chickens and mosquitoes are part of a statewide surveillance system for mosquito-borne diseases such as WNV, St. Louis (SLE) and Western Equine Encephalitis (WEE). This system has been in place for several years and has been boosted this year for the anticipated arrival of WNV. "When we heard that the virus was detected in Arizona and Utah last week, we knew, it wouldn't be much longer, until it gets here", Mellor said.

Nationwide there have been 715 human cases of WNV with 14 deaths this year. Last week the state announced the first human case of WNV in California, but it is presumed that the Alameda County woman was infected while visiting Colorado, where there have been over 260 reported cases this year.

The Antelope Valley Mosquito & Vector Control District is continuing a surveillance program with sentinel chickens and adult mosquito trapping. District technicians control mosquitoes in breeding sources, such as street curbs and gutters, roadside ditches, and retention basins. Technicians also inspect and treat a number of neglected pools and spas.

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

- 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. Keep pools chlorinated.
- Make sure that doors and windows have tight fitting screens. Repair or replace screens that have tears or holes.
- Avoid activity outside when mosquitoes are most active, especially at dawn and dusk.
- 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).

The District also provides mosquito eating fish free of charge to residents for fish ponds, unused swimming pools, water troughs, and other permanent standing water sources.

Many species of birds get infected and die from West Nile virus. The public can participate in the extensive virus monitoring effort of the California Department of Health Services (CDHS) by reporting birds 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 www.westnile.ca.gov or www.dhs.ca.gov.

For further information, please contact the District at (661) 942-2917 or visit our website at www.avmosquito.org. Our services, literature, and educational presentations are available at no charge to our residents.

Come see us at the AV Fair – We're in the Ag. Building in front of the Grandstands!