



**Antelope Valley Mosquito
& Vector Control District**
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NEWS RELEASE

– For Immediate Release

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Early Start For West Nile Virus Surveillance

Lancaster, CA – The Antelope Valley Mosquito & Vector Control District (AVMVCD) announced they will start the surveillance for West Nile Virus a month earlier than usual.

On March 1st AVMVCD staff will pick up 48 white leg horn chickens from an egg ranch in San Jacinto along with all the other Mosquito and Vector Control Districts in Southern California. Once back at the office they will be banded and blood samples are drawn from them. Afterwards they will be distributed to 8 coops throughout the Antelope Valley. (4 in Lancaster, 2 in Palmdale, 1 each in Quartz Hill and Rosamond).

These chickens are used as sentinels for mosquito-borne viruses, such as West Nile Virus, Western Equine Encephalomyelitis and St. Louis Encephalitis. At the end of last year's mosquito season the Mosquito and Vector Control Districts and the California Department of Health Services decided that the surveillance has to start earlier this year, since there was evidence of West Nile Virus as early as March in birds in 2004. Some Districts even chose to continue their surveillance throughout the winter to be able to detect virus early on.

This was very effective for the District in the western part of San Bernardino County, since they have just reported their first sero-conversion last Friday (2/25/05). That means that a mosquito infected the chicken with West Nile Virus in the week of February 15th. The first positive mosquito pool found in Orange County was collected on January 25th.

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 birds (except for pigeons, doves and chickens) by calling 1-877-WNV-BIRD (877-968-2473) or online at www.westnile.ca.gov. Birds that are not picked up by the end of the day can be safely discarded in the trashcan. Use gloves, a shovel or an inverted trash bag to pick up any dead bird.

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.
- * Make sure your sprinklers are set in a manner that will allow the ground to dry completely before the next cycle. Conserve water and prevent mosquito breeding.

- * 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.

There will be a photo opportunity with District staff tagging chickens, taking blood samples and placing them in coops at the selected sites.

We will be starting the process at around 11 AM at the District office. You may call the office at 942-2917 to confirm the time.