



Rebecca Nanyonjo-Kemp, DrPH
Director

Salvador Sandoval, MD, MPH
Health Officer

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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West Nile Virus Human Deaths

The Merced County Department of Public Health (Department) has confirmed two human deaths caused by West Nile Virus (WNV). Though reported in the month of October, both deaths occurred in the month of September. The Merced County residents were over the age of 50 with underlying health conditions.

As of October 2, 2020, a total of 93 cases with four (4) deaths were reported in California. “These tragic deaths from West Nile Virus are a strong reminder that everyone should increase efforts to protect themselves and their families from mosquito bites,” says Dr. Salvador Sandoval, Merced County Health Officer.

WNV is the leading cause of mosquito-borne disease in the continental United States. It is most commonly spread to people by the bite of an infected mosquito. There is currently no cure for WNV or vaccines to prevent WNV in people.

Most people infected with WNV do not feel sick. About one (1) in five (5) people who are infected develop a fever and other symptoms such as headache, pain, and fatigue. People with mild illness typically recover within about a week with symptomatic treatment. Less than one percent of infected people develop a serious, sometimes fatal, illness. Symptoms typically appear between two (2) and 14 days after the bite of an infected mosquito. People over the age of 60 and individuals with weakened immune systems are at an increased risk for severe disease.

“We are at the peak of the mosquito season here in Merced County. It is important that people take an active role in reducing mosquito breeding populations around their homes. Dump and drain any standing water. West Nile Virus can be very serious and it is important to not only protect yourselves but your loved ones as well,” states Rhiannon Jones, General Manager of Merced County Mosquito Abatement.

Below are actions you and your family can take to prevent and control mosquito-borne diseases:

- Apply insect repellents that contain DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus or IR 3535 according to label instructions. Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) website for all repellent recommendations.
- Use repellent, especially in the early morning and in the evening, when mosquitoes that carry WNV are most active.
- Eliminate standing water and containers that can hold water from around the home.
- Report dead birds, as they may be carriers of WNV.

For additional information about WNV or to report dead birds, visit the California Department of Public Health’s website at www.westnile.ca.gov or call 1-877-968-2473.

Please contact the Merced County Mosquito Abatement District for any concerns about mosquitoes in your area by visiting their website at www.mcmosquito.org.

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Vicki Jones, MPA, REHS
Environmental Health Division Director

Jessica Montoya-Juarez, MS
Assistant Public Health Director

Yadira Vazquez, MBA
Assistant Public Health Director

James Clark, MICP, MHOAC
EMS Administrator