

From San Mateo Daily Journal

West Nile Virus awareness week

By Robert Riechel

The threat of West Nile Virus continues to be present here in San Mateo County. In an effort to alert the residents of the county of San Mateo about the still present threat from West Nile Virus, the San Mateo County Mosquito Abatement District has asked each city council to help publicize West Nile Virus and Mosquito and Vector Control Awareness Week — April 24 through April 30 by adopting a resolution modeled after Senate Concurrent Resolution 126 (Keane).

West Nile Virus is a mosquito-borne disease that can result in debilitating cases of meningitis and encephalitis or death to humans, horses, avian species and other wildlife. In 2005, the virus killed 18 people throughout California and sickened 928 others.

Recognizing this week can increase public awareness of the West Nile Virus threat and encourage residents to eliminate mosquito-breeding sites on their property and to take appropriate precautions when mosquito activity is high.

The San Mateo County Mosquito Abatement District is an independent special district, striving to protect public health in an environmentally responsible manner. The district operates under an integrated pest management plan that targets mosquitoes in their immature stages. District mosquito control technicians regularly monitor sources of standing water for the presence of mosquito larvae and treat them as needed.

The materials used are specific to mosquitoes and do not harm other organisms. These materials include two forms of a naturally occurring bacteria and a hormone found only in insects. The district also provides mosquito fish for backyard fish ponds. Additional services include control of ground nesting yellow jackets, surveillance for ticks and Lyme disease, identification of insects or ticks and community education. County residents can report mosquito problems or take advantage of other district services.

West Nile Virus lives in a bird-mosquito cycle. Mosquitoes feed on infected birds, and in turn infect other birds.

Sometimes, these infected mosquitoes feed on other animals, such as humans. A small percentage of people infected will show symptoms, including fever, rash, and headache, to meningitis, encephalitis and death. The virus is not contagious (transmitted from person to person).

What can you do? Empty out or throw away all containers that can collect

water, such as paint cans, tarps, flower pots and tires. Have your ornamental ponds stocked with mosquito fish. These are delivered free of charge by district technicians when residents call 344-8592. Over-watering your lawn leads to standing water in which mosquitoes can breed. Make sure your doors and windows have screens and are in good repair. Seal any other gaps. Insect repellents containing the active ingredient DEET are effective against mosquitoes.

Always use repellent according to the instructions on the label. When possible, wear long sleeves, long pants and socks when outdoors. Mosquitoes may bite through thin clothing, so spray clothes with repellent to give extra protection. Take extra care to use repellent and protective clothing during evening and early morning — or consider avoiding outdoor activities during these times.

If you see a dead bird or squirrel — Help our surveillance program by reporting dead birds to our office immediately or 1-877-WNV-BIRD. The district is especially interested in the following: birds that have been dead for less than 24 hours, crows, ravens, scrub jays, stellar jays, magpies, sparrows, finches and red-tailed hawks, birds that do not show obvious signs of decomposition and birds that have not been infested with maggots. If you are unsure of any of the above conditions, please report the bird anyway. Please do not touch the bird. The SMCMAAD will arrange for pickup and laboratory testing for WNV when appropriate.

Your Mosquito Abatement District and health agencies are working together to protect our residents by 1.) routinely monitoring mosquito sources and treating them as needed 2.) coordinating with county health department epidemiologists to monitor meningitis and encephalitis cases in humans and horses, 3.) maintaining two sentinel chicken flocks which are tested routinely to detect virus activity, 4.) collecting and testing mosquitoes for the presence of the virus, and 5.) testing dead birds and squirrels for WNV.

By reporting dead birds and squirrels to state and local health departments, you can play an important role in curtailing West Nile Virus. Further information and links to other sources of information can be found at the District Web site (<http://www.SMCMAAD.org>) and at the California Department of Health Services Web site (<http://www.westnile.ca.gov>).

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