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Two more dead squirrels found carrying West Nile in San Mateo County this week

By **bonnie Eslinger**
Daily News Staff Writer
Posted: 09/24/2010 08:45:35 PM PDT
Updated: 09/25/2010 12:42:38 AM PDT

Two dead squirrels that tested positive for West Nile virus were found this week in San Carlos and Burlingame.

Chindi Peavey, an ecologist with the San Mateo County Mosquito and Vector Control District, said the dead animals are evidence that infected mosquitoes are in the area.

"We use the dead animals as a sentinel to know when we have an infection in mosquitoes," Peavey said Thursday.

The district has collected a total of five West Nile-positive squirrels this year to date, including the animals found this week in San Carlos and Burlingame. Earlier this year, two infected squirrels were discovered in San Mateo and one in Redwood City.

West Nile virus, which is also potentially deadly to humans, is transmitted through mosquito bites.

In Contra Costa County, officials announced this week that a group of mosquitoes tested positive for the virus. San Mateo County has yet to turn up a mosquito with West Nile, Peavey said.

The dead animals are not cause for alarm, Peavey said; summer is the season when West Nile activity peaks. However, the district is on heightened alert because mosquito populations increase during the warmer months, she said.

"We're keeping a real tight look at the mosquito population and larvae control," she said.

Earlier this month, an elderly Fresno County woman died of complications related to West Nile, California's first such death of 2010, according to public health officials from that

county. Statewide there have been 51 reported cases of human infection, including seven new cases this week from Fresno, Kern, Madera and San Joaquin counties, according to California's West Nile virus website.

Mosquitoes breed in standing water, so the San Mateo County Mosquito and Vector Control District recommends residents turn over water buckets, check sprinkler systems for leaks, fix broken pipes and add mosquito fish -- available for free from the district -- to backyard fish ponds or stagnant pools.

The district also asks that residents report dead squirrels and birds by calling 877-968-2473.

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