



**SAN MATEO COUNTY
MOSQUITO ABATEMENT DISTRICT
AND
THE COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
HEALTH DEPARTMENT**



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**TREE SQUIRREL TESTS POSITIVE FOR WEST NILE VIRUS
IN SAN MATEO COUNTY**

SAN MATEO, Calif. – An eastern grey squirrel, collected on July 9 by the San Mateo County Mosquito Abatement District, tested positive for West Nile virus (WNV) at the University of California Davis Center for Vectorborne Diseases (CVEC). Although this is the first detection of WNV in San Mateo County in 2007, WNV has been detected in the County since 2004. To date in California, 32 counties have reported WNV activity, with human cases in four counties and one death in Kern County.

“After birds, WNV tends to infect tree squirrels. There is no evidence that people could get WNV by being close to squirrels,” said Dr. Alvaro Garza, San Mateo County Deputy Health Officer. “However, the presence of infected squirrels means that there likely are infected mosquitoes nearby, which increases the chances that human cases may appear in San Mateo County. We urge residents to take steps now to protect themselves from mosquito bites.”

Last year there were a total of 278 cases of WNV in California residents, predominantly in Southern California, and 7 deaths from the disease. No human cases of WNV were reported in San Mateo County in 2006.

West Nile virus is passed by infected mosquitoes to birds, humans, horses and squirrels. Birds, especially crows, are highly susceptible to West Nile virus. Reports of dead birds and tree squirrels are an early indicator that the virus is circulating in the environment.

Local mosquito control districts and health departments are working in coordination with the California Department of Public Health, the CVEC, and the California Animal Health and Food Safety Laboratory in a statewide interagency surveillance program for WNV. Residents are encouraged to help track and control West Nile virus by reporting recently dead birds and squirrels to the State online at www.westnile.ca.gov or by telephone at 877-WNV-BIRD (877/968-2473). Although not all birds or squirrels are suitable for testing, all calls are important because they help determine areas of high risk. Handling of sick squirrels should be avoided, as the sick animals may bite.

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First Dead Squirrel Tests Positive for West Nile Virus in San Mateo County

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Individuals can reduce their risk of mosquito-borne diseases by taking these precautions:

- DRAIN standing water around the house weekly since it's where mosquitoes lay eggs, including: tires, cans, flowerpots, clogged rain gutters, rain barrels, toys and puddles.
- DUSK & DAWN are when mosquitoes that carry the virus are most active, so take precautions to prevent mosquito bites when outdoors at these times.
- DEET is an effective ingredient to look for in insect repellents. Always follow label instructions carefully.
- DRESS in long sleeves and pants during dawn and dusk or in areas where mosquitoes are active.
- REPLACE damaged or missing screens on windows and doors.

If there is a significant mosquito problem where you live or work in San Mateo County, contact the Mosquito Abatement District at (650) 344-8592.

West Nile virus disease is rare, but if you have symptoms including high fever, severe headache and stiff neck, contact your health care provider immediately.

Vaccinations for horses are available. Horse owners should contact a veterinarian to discuss this preventive measure. The timing of the vaccine is critical because it must be administered prior to disease exposure.

For more information on West Nile virus visit these Web sites:

- San Mateo County Health Department www.smhealth.org/fightthebite
- San Mateo County Mosquito Abatement District www.smcmad.org
- State of California www.westnile.ca.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov

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