



For Immediate Release
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West Nile Virus Remains a Serious Threat in California as Summer Months Approach

West Nile Virus and Mosquito and Vector Control Awareness Week educates California residents on preventing mosquito-borne viruses.

SACRAMENTO, APRIL 18, 2016 – Mosquitoes and warm weather go hand in hand. With summer rapidly approaching, Californians need to be aware of the serious risk West Nile virus (WNV) presents to their health.

To raise awareness and educate Californians about the threat mosquitoes and vectors pose to our communities, the California Legislature declared April 17 – 23, 2016 as West Nile Virus and Mosquito and Vector Control Awareness Week.

“While a lot of attention has been given to Zika virus, West Nile virus killed more Californians in 2015 than any other year before,” said Senator Bob Wieckowski, chair of the Environmental Quality Committee and author of Senate Concurrent Resolution 121. “Properly funded local mosquito abatement programs are vital to protecting public health and saving lives.”

The ongoing drought has posed an increased risk for mosquito transmitted diseases. As California slowly recovers from 2015’s driest winter in recorded history, the threat of West Nile virus and other mosquito-borne diseases still looms. Last year, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) confirmed 783 cases of WNV in California. Of these, 544 developed the more severe neuroinvasive form of the disease resulting in 53 fatalities.

“These are record numbers for California. To protect public health it is critical that California’s local mosquito and vector control programs continue educating communities about best practices that help prevent diseases transmitted by mosquitoes and other vectors,” said Kenn Fujioka, President of the Mosquito and Vector Control Association of California (MVCAC). “The threat of all mosquito transmitted diseases, especially West Nile virus is real and cannot be underestimated. We must remain diligent in both our education and control efforts.”

Zika virus is the latest international mosquito-borne threat, putting United States health officials on high alert. Representatives of state and local agencies emphasize that although widespread infections with Zika virus is currently not likely, the mosquitoes that transmit it are [now present in California](#), and they are expanding their territory.

State and local agencies are charged with protecting the health of Californians from mosquito-borne diseases, but they cannot do it alone. “Our agencies now face new mosquito species and the diseases



they can transmit, including West Nile virus. There are no vaccines or treatment for any of these diseases. California residents must share the responsibility of removing sources of water on their property so mosquitoes cannot develop,” said Fujioka. “Adequate funding, surveillance, targeted control programs, education, and community participation are the keys to prevention and protecting more than 38 million Californians from mosquito-borne threats.”

To minimize exposure to mosquito bites:

1. When outdoors:
 - a. Apply insect repellent containing DEET, picaradin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or IR3535 according to label instructions. Repellents keep mosquitoes from biting. DEET can be used safely on infants and children 2 months of age and older.
 - b. Dress in long sleeves and pants.

2. At home:
 - a. Install or repair screens on windows and doors.
 - b. Empty all sources of standing water on your property, including in flower pots, old tires, and buckets. Remember: invasive *Aedes* can lay their eggs in very small sources of water, like a bottle cap. If you are being bitten by mosquitoes during the day, please contact your local mosquito and vector control agency.

For additional information on Zika virus: <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/Zika.aspx>

Travelers should refer to the CDC’s Travel Advisories:

<http://www.cdc.gov/zika/>

The MVCAC will be participating in a public education effort, “Fight the Bite 2016,” at the State Capitol on Thursday, April 21st from 1:30 pm – 4:30 pm.

To increase awareness and enforce prevention and control programs statewide, the MVCAC provides support to more than 65 districts throughout California. As a result, approximately half the land area and 85 percent of California’s population are within the boundaries of a mosquito control program.

MVCAC represents special districts, other subdivisions of local government, and the state of California which are responsible for mosquito and vector control, surveillance of WNV and other vector-borne diseases, as well as public education programs to help Californians protect themselves from disease. MVCAC advocates safe, effective, and environmentally friendly methods of mosquito and vector control.