

One of worst West Nile seasons continues in Fresno County

By Barbara Anderson



Mosquito biting an arm U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Fresno County residents are experiencing one of the worst years for West Nile virus, say public health and mosquito control officials.

More people have become seriously ill this year from the infection. Most often, the virus causes no symptoms or only minor flu-like illness, but this year more than half the reported cases have been severe, causing neurological complications, such as encephalitis and meningitis, the officials said.

As of Friday, 30 people in the county had been infected, and 17 of the patients had the neuroinvasive form of the disease, said David Luchini, assistant director of the Fresno County Department of Public Health.

The virus also has sent all but three people to hospitals for treatment, Luchini said. "This is a reminder, you've got to take this seriously."

Statewide, there have been 181 human cases, an increase from the 101 cases reported this same time last year. Tulare County has had seven cases, according to state reports, and Madera County has had two cases.

Eight deaths in the state have been reported -- none in the central San Joaquin Valley.

Denise Holt Wasson of Fresno said her family has been turned upside down by West Nile virus. In July, her husband, Jim Wasson, was diagnosed with the severe form of the virus. He spent weeks in the hospital and continues to need

outpatient care.

"He has lost the use of his right arm and still needs assistance walking," Holt Wasson said. The virus also affected his inner ear and vision and caused damage to his liver.

"This is ever life changing," she said. Her husband is an attorney, but now, she said, "we are in the process of closing our law office."

Wasson likely was bitten at home in mid-July, she said. His routine was to come home, eat dinner, retreat outdoors and go for a swim.

On Wednesday, the couple attended a back-to-school night for their grandchildren. They took fliers from the mosquito abatement district to warn families of West Nile activity and to protect themselves from mosquito bites. "We don't want anyone else to go through this," Holt Wasson said.

The West Nile season is not over, said Steve Mulligan, director of the Consolidated Mosquito Abatement District in Clovis. "If it stays warm, we'll continue to have mosquito activity -- we'll continue to have West Nile activity -- and we can have activity into October."

The mosquitoes bite at night, from sunset to sunrise, and people should wear long sleeves and long pants when outdoors during those times or use mosquito repellent, Mulligan said.

"We really ask the public's help," Mulligan said. People should check their yards for standing water, report neglected swimming pools that can be breeding grounds for mosquitoes, and call for mosquito control if they see mosquitoes, he said. And when mosquito workers leave notices on doors asking if they can check a property, "let us," he said.

"You don't want to get infected with West Nile virus. It's not a good experience."

Fresno County West Nile human cases: So far in Fresno County this year there have been more people with severe cases with neurological complications from West Nile than in any previous year.

2014: 30 total; 17 severe

2013: 8; 5

2012: 15; 11

2011: 9; 6

2010: 23; 14

2009: 13; 6

2008: 3; 2

2007: 16; 4

• Source: Fresno County Department of Public Health

Taking precautions

To prevent exposure to mosquito bites and West Nile virus:

• Apply insect repellent containing DEET, picaradin, oil of lemon eucalyptus or IR3535 according to label instructions. DEET can be used safely on infants and children 2 months of age and older.

- Wear protective clothing and repellent if outside at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active. Make sure doors and windows have tight-fitting screens to keep out mosquitoes. Repair or replace screens with tears or holes.
- Eliminate or drain all sources of standing water where mosquitoes can lay eggs. Report neglected swimming pools to mosquito and vector control agencies.

To report mosquitoes and neglected pools:

Fresno County

- Consolidated Mosquito Abatement District: (800) 821-1577; www.mosquitobuzz.net
- Fresno Mosquito & Vector Control District: (559) 268-6565; www.fresnomosquito.org

Kings County

- Kings Mosquito Abatement District: (559) 584-3326; www.kingsmosquito.net

Madera County

- Madera Mosquito & Vector Control District: (559) 662-8880; www.maderamosq.org

Tulare County

- Delta Vector Control District: (559) 732-8606; www.deltavcd.com
- Tulare Mosquito Abatement District: (559) 686-6628

State

- Dead birds and squirrels that may be infected with the West Nile virus can be reported by calling (877) 968-2473 or by filing an online report at the California West Nile website at www.westnile.ca.gov.

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