

Chico Student contracts West Nile Virus

[Kaley Wise](#), TheOrion.com

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Nick Lopez, a Chico State student, says he was recently diagnosed with the West Nile Virus, making him the first school victim of the possibly deadly disease this year.

“It’s honestly been the toughest challenge of my life so far,” the 21-year-old kinesiology student said. “It makes me super fatigued and it’s hard to focus. I have to get more rest and relax as much as I can.”

So far this year, there have been 13 recorded cases in Butte County, according to officials.

West Nile is a disease transmitted from Culex mosquitoes which can lead to fever, hives, flu-like symptoms and even result in death. In some cases, West Nile can lead to meningitis or encephalitis. There is no cure available to humans for the virus, though antidotes have been developed for horses. Recovery can take several months and some effects may be permanent.

“About 80 percent of people infected with the virus will not display symptoms,” Doug Weseman, manager of the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District said.

But Lopez said he knew there was something wrong when he broke out in hives and felt lethargic at the beginning of the summer. Fearing that he was suffering from something serious, he went to his doctor, who gave him a blood test. He said the panel came back positive for West Nile.

The virus has made it difficult for him to begin his junior year, he added that he feels not only physically fatigued, but mentally drained. Besides suffering from high fevers and light sensitivity, his energy is low and he wants to sleep all the time.

“I have to step away from strenuous exercise in order to let my body recover,” Lopez said. “Which is hard because I love exercising and playing soccer.”

Though Lopez knows the disease is something he will have to live with for an extended amount of time, he is keeping a positive outlook.

“I feel like I can see the light at the end of the tunnel,” he said. “I keep in mind that tons of people around the world have way tougher things to deal with every day as compared to my few months of dealing with West Nile. There are tons of positives I’m taking away from this challenge, one being acquiring a huge appreciation for good health, which is one of the most important things in life.”

The Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District is taking measures to eliminate the mosquitos before they become full-blown adults.

Weseman said that the disease can lay dormant in humans for a long period of time so it is hard to predict the exact location where a person contracted the disease.

“We go out and find breeding sources of mosquitos and eliminate them,” Weseman said. “We are trying to kill them in the larva stage. We use various methods of spraying chemicals in areas outside of Chico, though we do not spray directly in Chico. We fly our ULV airplane on the outskirts at night- which is Ultra Low Volume mission.”

The public health pesticides that are used for fogging are registered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Weseman said.

It is very common for West Nile to appear in Butte County during the hot dry season. Last year hit a record high in the county with 55 reported human cases.

“It is important to wear repellent with deet or oil of eucalyptus, wear long pants and shirts and to avoid being out during hours of dusk or dawn,” Weseman said. “When West Nile came into Butte County in 2004 it never left. It keeps coming back.”

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