

Chico woman stricken with severe West Nile virus

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CHICO -- A woman in her 60s from Chico is recovering from a case of West Nile virus that sent her to the hospital.

Dr. Mark Lundberg, Butte County's public health officer, said he received confirmation Tuesday from a state lab that the woman did have West Nile virus.

Her illness was the first human case of West Nile this year in Butte County.

Lundberg said the woman, who lives in the Hegan Lane area, was at Enloe Medical Center for a time but is now at home, trying to regain her strength.

She was stricken with one of the rare neuro-invasive cases of the disease, which causes an infection of the brain, Lundberg said.

She became ill at the end of July and went into the hospital at the beginning of August.

In her case, the infection made her so weak she couldn't care for herself, he said. "She developed high fevers, a rash and headaches, and she had quite profound weakness, which got her admitted to the hospital."

"We are very thankful she is making a recovery, but she is still trying to get back to her normal state," Lundberg said. "It could take a while."

West Nile virus is carried by certain types of mosquitoes. People get the disease when they are bitten by infected mosquitoes.

Eighty percent of those who contract West Nile virus experience no symptoms at all although blood tests will show they had the disease, Lundberg said. Twenty percent get mild fevers and feel somewhat ill. Only one in 150 people who become infected get the neuro-invasive form of the illness.

When seriously ill West Nile patients go into the hospital, they are given "supportive care," Lundberg said. That means making sure they get enough liquids and nutrition. Sometimes a feeding tube is needed.

In the most severe cases, patients can have seizures or go into comas, the health officer said. Sometimes the disease is fatal.

Butte County had its first human case of West Nile in 2004. There have been about 100 human cases since then, including five people who died, the health officer said. "Every year since (2004) we have had human cases," he said. Last year Butte had four and the year before there were two.

According to the state's West Nile virus website (<http://westnile.ca.gov>), there have been 23 human cases in nine California counties this year. One person has died.

Glenn County health officials reported a human case recently, but it was not listed on the state website because of a policy to not include cases of people, like this woman, who show no symptoms.

Health officials have said West Nile is more prevalent this year than last year.

On Tuesday, the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District reported that three more of its groups of trapped mosquitoes had tested positive for West Nile.

That brought the total number of positive mosquito groups to nine this year. The highest number of positive groups in any previous year was five.

Lundberg said this is the peak of the West Nile virus season. He recommended people try to prevent mosquito bites by avoiding being outside at dawn and dusk, wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants and using mosquito repellent.