

First 2013 Butte County human case of West Nile Virus confirmed in Chico

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CHICO -- The first human case of West Nile virus in Butte County for 2013 has been confirmed.

An elementary school-aged girl from north Chico tested positive for West Nile virus, according to Dr. Mark Lundberg, Butte County Health Officer.

"This first confirmed West Nile virus case reminds us that we must take precautions to protect ourselves and our families from mosquito bites," Lundberg said.

"We are definitely seeing West Nile virus activity in Butte County. The public should take extra care to avoid mosquito bites. Prevention is the key to stopping the spread of the virus."

The child has already made a full recovery, he said.

"We're very thankful she has no symptoms now and she's feeling fine," Lundberg said.

The child had a number of health care visits in mid-July for a fever and severe headaches, which are a couple symptoms of the virus, Lundberg said. Other signs of West Nile virus are aches, muscle tenderness, nausea, loss of appetite and abdominal pain.

It can take three to 14 days since the initial mosquito bite for symptoms to show.

Eighty percent of people who have the infection show no symptoms, Lundberg said. Those individuals develop antibodies, making them immune to the infection.

"The majority of people get the infection, but have no noticeable symptoms and they get immunity from that," he said.

Close to 20 percent of people who have the virus show signs of fever and other symptoms, which often go undiagnosed and unreported, and 1 percent or less show neurological symptoms from the virus, he said.

Neurological cases, which occur when the infection has reached the brain, are always reported because its severity causes the person to go to the hospital.

"When you get those neuro cases, you know that there are about 150 infections that you didn't pick up on," Lundberg said.

As of Aug. 2, activity of the virus has been detected in 33 of California's 58 counties. Fourteen counties report human cases of the infection.

In Butte County, five dead birds, 13 sentinel chickens, one squirrel and 14 groups of mosquitoes have tested positive for West Nile virus.

"There is a mosquito in Chico carrying the virus," Lundberg said.

Lundberg recommends that the citizens of Butte County take steps toward West Nile virus prevention by using repellents like DEET.

"People shouldn't wait until they feel a bite to use a repellent," Lundberg said. "Use a repellent even though you don't feel a bite."

It's also important to wear proper clothing and repellent if outside during dawn and dusk because mosquitoes bite in the early morning and evening, he said. Eliminating all sources of standing water also prevents mosquitoes from laying eggs on standing water.

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