

## **Small bugs, big consequences**

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There have been 30 [confirmed cases](#) of West Nile virus in Butte County, the highest of any county in the state.

Butte County has had an “epidemic level” of cases reported, according to Matt Ball, the district manager at the [Butte County Public Health Department](#).

There are now [57](#) confirmed cases of West Nile in California alone and more than half of these cases have been reported in Butte County.

With Butte County having such a high volume of mosquitoes carrying West Nile, education on the subject can benefit the health of students and residents in the area.

Matt Ball, District Manager at the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District, discusses the severity of West Nile virus in the Butte County area.

### **What is West Nile virus?**

[West Nile](#) virus is a disease commonly transmitted from mosquitoes to humans after a mosquito has bitten an infected bird. The virus was originally found in Africa, Eastern Europe, Western Asia and the Middle East. However, before 1999 the disease was not known in the Western Hemisphere.

The virus has no medical cure, which forces those who are infected to wait it out until the virus ceases. [Complications](#) with symptoms can make West Nile virus more serious and in some cases, fatal.

### **Why Butte County?**

The [drought](#) in California plays a big role in the large number of cases in Butte County. The low amount of rain can extend [mosquito seasons](#).

The drought also draws mosquitoes carrying the virus to agricultural lands that are still being watered. Butte County has a lot of agricultural land, hence the high volume of West Nile cases.

### **What are the symptoms of West Nile virus?**

Most people, [\(70 to 80 percent\)](#), who contract West Nile virus feel no symptoms at all. However, this varies from person to person. Ball spoke with a woman recently who contracted the virus and experienced severe symptoms.

“On her fifth week of the virus, she still was not able to get out of bed,” he said.

Signs of West Nile virus can range anywhere from flu-like symptoms to serious neurological symptoms. Some of these include:

- Fever
- Headaches
- Body Aches
- Fatigue

Even without feeling symptoms, recovering from the virus takes several weeks or even months, and some neurological effects are permanent, Ball said.

Pain relievers can be prescribed to victims of the virus, but there is no real medical cure or treatment. There is a vaccine to prevent horses from the virus, but there is not yet a vaccine safe for [humans](#).

“West Nile is just like any other virus, it needs to fully run its course,” Ball said.

### **How can students and residents prevent themselves from this disease?**

There are many solutions beyond bug spray and bug lamps to help prevent contracting West Nile virus.

Mosquitoes breed in pools of [standing water](#). Eliminating any standing water in your yard or outdoor area will make a big difference in the number of mosquitoes you encounter.

Eliminating old tires or containers that may hold water will also lower the amount of mosquitoes.

Ball also recommends staying indoors or in areas with a lower amount of mosquitoes at the times when the bugs are most active.

Mosquitoes are abundant an hour before and an hour after both sunrise and sunset.

Additionally, the [Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District](#) also provides [services](#) to eliminate bugs at houses located in higher mosquito volume areas.

“What most people don’t realize is that the West Nile virus is 100 percent preventable,” Ball said. “Take precaution this fall, and protect yourself against West Nile virus.”

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