

West Nile detected in Butte County

By LARRY MITCHELL - Staff Writer, Chicoer.com

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PARADISE -- West Nile virus has been detected in Butte County for the first time this year.

On Wednesday, the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District received confirmation a dead squirrel found in Paradise had been killed by the virus.

Matt Ball, manager of the district, said it's very likely the virus is now present in mosquitoes throughout the north valley.

It's time to take precautions, he said. That means eliminating all standing water on your property and avoiding being bitten by mosquitoes.

It doesn't take much water for mosquitoes to breed, he said. Even water standing in a saucer under a flower pot is sufficient.

"We've found thousands of mosquito larvae in a 12-inch saucer," Ball said.

How do you avoid mosquito bites? A couple of ways are making sure you have good screens on your windows and avoiding being outside in the early morning and at dusk, when mosquitoes are most active.

If you have to be outside, wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts, and use an effective repellent, such as those containing DEET, Picaridin, IR3535 or oil of lemon eucalyptus.

Most people who become infected with West Nile virus have no symptoms or very mild ones. But some people become sick and a small number of them require hospitalization and may even die.

In California, over the last seven years, 2,877 human cases of West Nile have been recorded, and 95 of these people died, according to a state website (www.westnile.ca.gov).

So far this year in the state, there have been no human cases of the illness. To date, the virus has been detected in 11 California counties.

Over the last few years in California, the numbers of human cases have been declining. The largest numbers were in 2005, when 880 human cases were recorded, and 19 people died. Last year, 112 human cases were recorded, and four people died.

So far this year, mosquito populations in the county have been pretty small due to relatively cool weather, Ball said. Staff from the district set traps to see if mosquitoes are present.

With hot weather predicted for this weekend, it may be time for "mosquito season" to kick off, he said.

When the weather stays hot, mosquitoes develop more quickly, he said. Under ideal conditions, they can turn from larvae into adults within five days or less.

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