

# West Nile virus flourishing late this season

By LARRY MITCHELL - Staff Writer (ChicoER.com)

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OROVILLE — Local health officials warned residents Wednesday to be vigilant about avoiding mosquito bites, because West Nile virus remains widespread in Butte County.

Usually during September the virus declines. But this year, West Nile indicators have increased, said Matt Ball, manager of the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District.

More dead birds infected with West Nile, more infected chickens in the test flocks, and more captured mosquitoes that were carrying the virus have appeared in September than earlier in the summer, Ball said.

He said he didn't know why, but he was clear about what people need to do: Avoid being outside at dawn and dusk, apply effective mosquito repellent and don't allow water to stagnate in their yards.

This season differs from other years, he said, in that the virus is so dispersed throughout the county. In the past few seasons, it has been concentrated in a few areas.

Although Chico residents aren't seeing lots of mosquitoes, the ones that carry West Nile are out there, Ball said.

In areas near rice fields, residents have hundreds and even thousands of mosquitoes in their yards during the evening, he said. Most of these are the "rice-field mosquito," known scientifically as *Anopheles freeborni*. It doesn't carry West Nile, he said. But a mosquito that does carry the virus, *Culex tarsalis*, is present in those areas, too.

So far this year in the Butte County district, West Nile virus has been detected in one person, six wild birds, seven mosquito pools, six sentinel chickens, one squirrel and one horse.

Last year at this time in the district, the virus had been found in one person, 12 birds, four mosquito pools, 25 sentinel chickens, no squirrels and no horses.

Sentinel chickens belong to flocks the district keeps to track the virus. Periodically blood samples are taken to see if the chickens have been bitten by mosquitoes carrying the virus.

Mosquito pools are groups of mosquitoes that have been caught in traps the district sets.

So far this year, according to a website maintained by the state Department of Public Health and other groups, West Nile has appeared in 34 California counties. There have been 55 human cases and one fatality. Sixteen horses have been infected, 359 infected dead birds have been found,

1,217 mosquito pools have tested positive, 219 sentinel chickens have become infected, and 16 infected squirrels have been found.

Last year at this time, the virus had appeared in 41 counties, there had been 68 human cases, 11 infected horses, 449 dead birds, 1,005 mosquito pools, 309 sentinel chickens, and nine infected squirrels.

For 2009 as a whole, there were 112 human cases of West Nile and four deaths. Since 2003, the state has seen 2,877 reported human cases of West Nile and 95 fatalities.

Health officials recommend using mosquito repellent containing DEET, picaradin, IR3535 or oil of lemon eucalyptus.

The say standing water or significant mosquito problems should be reported to the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District.

Dead birds should be reported by calling 1-877-968-2473.

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