



City and County of San Francisco

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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San Francisco Readies for West Nile Virus Season

First WNV positive Bird found in San Francisco Near City College

San Francisco, CA—West Nile Virus (WNV) infection, caused by the bite of a mosquito carrying the virus, is on the rise throughout California and across the nation. As of September 18, 2012 126 human cases of WNV infection have been reported in California, including 6 WNV-related deaths. Nationally, 3,142 cases including 134 fatalities have been reported to the US Centers for Disease Control, making this year the highest number of cases reported year-to-date since 2003. Almost forty percent of the nationally reported cases are from Texas.

West Nile Virus can occur in San Francisco, though no locally acquired human cases have ever been reported in the City since 2005 when it became a reportable disease. Mosquitoes can transmit WNV to birds, and so the recent finding of one West Nile-infected dead bird in San Francisco indicates that the virus is present in the local environment this year. This is only the third WNV-positive bird in the City since 2007. The warm weather that San Franciscans enjoy beginning in September is the environment that sets the stage for mosquitoes to breed and multiply, increasing the need to remind residents that preventing a mosquito bite is always the best first step in combating disease.

Working on the success of the popular *Fight the Bite* campaign that helped launch West Nile Virus awareness throughout California, local authorities from the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, Department of Environment, Department of Public Works and the Department of Public Health are focusing their efforts on keeping San Franciscans safe from mosquitoes and reminding residents to eliminate stagnant water where mosquitoes breed.

“San Franciscans will be at risk for West Nile during the summer and fall when mosquito activity is at its peak,” observed Rajiv Bhatia, MD, Medical Director for Environmental Health at the San Francisco Department of Public Health. “West Nile Virus is preventable and it takes all of us working together to continue to keep ourselves and our families protected.”

The mission of the San Francisco Department of Public Health is to protect and promote the health of all San Franciscans.

We shall ~ Assess and research the health of the community ~ Develop and enforce health policy ~ Prevent disease and injury ~
~ Educate the public and train health care providers ~ Provide quality, comprehensive, culturally-proficient health services ~ Ensure equal access to all ~

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In urban areas, the single largest source of mosquito breeding are storm drains and basins which, in San Francisco, are being regularly inspected and treated to prevent mosquitoes from hatching into adults. Homeowners can prevent mosquito breeding by keeping fish in ornamental ponds, repairing plumbing leaks, letting lawns dry before watering, clearing drains and gutters, and changing water in birdbaths, plant saucers or wading pools at least weekly. Mosquito bites can be avoided by wearing long sleeved clothing and using a repellent when mosquitoes are active, and by putting screens on windows.

The San Francisco Department of Public Health's Environmental Health section is available to enforce health code violations such as standing water or plumbing leaks. Complaints can be made through the City's 3-1-1 customer service system, either on line or by calling 3-1-1.

"We are once again asking San Franciscans to be vigilant about mosquitoes and mosquito bite prevention," said Tomás Aragón, MD, Health Officer for the City and County of San Francisco. "People over the age of 50 and anyone with a weakened immune system need to be particularly cautious. Anyone with a high fever and headache for seven days should see a health care professional. Like sunburn, West Nile Virus is completely preventable. A little prevention goes a long way in keeping everyone safe."

Fight the Bite San Francisco campaign recommends the following methods to reduce the likelihood of getting bitten by an infected mosquito:

- Eliminate all sources of standing water where mosquitoes can breed
- While outdoors at dawn and dusk, wear long pants and shirts
- Apply insect repellent to exposed skin according to label instructions
- Report significant mosquito activity to DPH by calling 3-1-1
- Report dead birds to the State at 1/877/WNV-BIRD

For more information, the public can go to the following sources:

www.sfmosquito.org and www.westnile.ca.gov.

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