

West Nile virus risk highest of the season, but better than last year in Butte County

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OROVILLE, Calif. - The Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District has confirmed that 35 groups of mosquitoes, 25 sentinel chicken, and 11 dead birds are confirmed positive for West Nile virus.

The District has identified the virus in areas near or in Chico, Biggs, Dayton, Gridley, Richvale, Nelson, Palermo, Wyandotte, Honcut, Hamilton City and outlying agricultural areas.

"We're looking for the Culex species, which are the northern house mosquitoes," said Eric Gohre, an entomologist with the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District. "The Vulex Pipien, the Culex Tarsalis and the Western Encephalitis mosquito (also carry the virus).

Since the West Nile Virus made its way into Butte County in 2004 there have been 208 confirmed cases of human infection. Of those 55 of them occurred last year during the driest part of California's four-year drought.

"It's just a longer season when you have a drought," said Doug Weseman, the assistant manager of the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District. "That was the fourth year of the drought, and it started earlier than this year when we had a lot of rain."

Depending on temperatures, the West Nile season usually lasts through September.

The best way to avoid contracting the virus, which can cause severe flu-like symptoms and even death, is to apply insect repellent when outdoors, especially at dusk and dawn. People are also advised to wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts, socks and shoes when outdoors. It's also advisable to be sure your doors and windows have tight-fitting screens to keep mosquitoes from entering homes.