# Butte health officials warn of West Nile risk

Staff Reports (ChicoER.com)
Posted:   09/20/2012 08:57:49 AM PDT

OROVILLE — As more reports of West Nile virus come in, Butte County health officials say it's essential that people protect themselves against mosquito bites.

Among other things, they recommend avoiding being outside at dawn and dusk, and using an effective mosquito repellent.

Five more groups of mosquitoes trapped by the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District have tested positive for the virus, according to a district news release.

In addition, the district received confirmation of nine more West Nile-positive dead birds and five more positive sentinel chickens, the release said.

The chickens are part of flocks the district keeps in various parts of the county. Their blood is tested periodically to see if they've been bitten by mosquitoes carrying the virus.

Throughout the nation, incidence West Nile virus is much higher this year than it has been over the past several years.

"It's imperative that residents assist with the prevention of mosquitoes' breeding by eliminating all standing water from their properties," Matt Ball, the district manager was quoted as saying in the release.

The virus has been found in Butte County every year since 2004. Over the last eight years, 100 residents have been infected with the virus, seven of whom died.

Six Butte County residents have contracted West Nile so far this year.

Also, this season in the district, which includes Butte County and Hamilton City, 24 groups of trapped mosquitoes, 40 dead birds, 41 sentinel chickens, one horse and one squirrel have tested positive for the virus.

West Nile is usually prevalent from May through October, when mosquitoes are most abundant.

Mosquitoes contract the virus when they feed on infected birds. They spread the virus when they bite people or animals.

There is a high mortality rate among horses that get the disease. Owners are encouraged to make sure their horses are kept current with West Nile vaccinations.