

Chico a high-risk area for West Nile virus

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CHICO — Residents of central Chico are at high risk for catching West Nile virus, according to the state Department of Public Health.

State officials used what's called a "virus modeling program" to determine the area is a likely place for human cases of the illness to appear.

People who live throughout the north valley need to take precautions, said Matt Ball, manager of the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District. That means avoiding being outside in early mornings and at dusk, wearing repellent if you are outside, and eliminating standing water from around your yard.

Ball said he received a map of Butte County from the state Department of Public Health showing a large area of central Chico marked in red. The red high-risk area is centered on East First Avenue and covers much of the central part of the city on both sides of Highway 99, he said.

To predict where human cases of West Nile are likely to break out, state officials put various types of information into their modeling program, he said. The data includes human population density, estimates of numbers of mosquitoes, reports of birds that died of West Nile, and mosquito samples that have tested positive for the virus, Ball said.

He said trucks from the district were to spray the insecticide pyrethrin into the air in parts of Chico Tuesday night. The chemical is safe for people and pets, he added.

Tuesday was the first time this year that conditions were right for the spraying, which

is known as "fogging," he said. The spray is applied from the beds of the district's red pickups, which drive slowly through neighborhoods. Good air quality and no more than a very gentle breeze are required for the work.

For information on the district's fogging plans, check the Web site of the county Public Health Department, at www.buttecounty.net/publichealth, or call the district at 342-7350 or 533-6038.

No human cases of West Nile virus have been reported in the north valley so far this year. A number of dead birds have tested positive for the virus, including eight in Butte County and three in Glenn County.

Gridley was also due to be fogged Tuesday. Officials in Glenn County planned to spray the northern part of the county Tuesday night.

To date this year in the state, 13 human cases of West Nile have been reported in seven counties. Last year at this time, 65 human cases had been reported. Nationally, 43 cases have been reported so far this year compared to 122 at this point last year.

So far, no reports of West Nile in birds or mosquito samples have been reported in Tehama and Colusa counties. Many people who contract West Nile don't even know they have it, while others get mild, flu-like symptoms. In a small percentage of cases, the virus can cause severe illness and even death.

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