

South county woman is Butte's first West Nile case this year

By LARRY MITCHELL-Staff Writer, ChicoER.com
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OROVILLE — An Oroville- area woman has come down with Butte County's first confirmed case of West Nile virus this year.

The woman, described as being in her 40s, lives in the south Palermo area, Matt Ball, manager of the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District, said Friday.

After she became sick, she was put in the hospital, he said. Now, she is home, recovering.

Earlier this week, Glenn County health officials reported the first human case of West Nile in that county. An elderly woman from south Orland became ill and was hospitalized.

Around California, this has been a light year for West Nile virus. Until about two weeks ago, there had only been a dozen human cases around the state. As of Friday, 27 human cases had been confirmed in 10 counties, including Butte and Glenn.

The virus is transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. The virus is passed back and forth between mosquitoes and birds. A bird with the virus is bitten by a mosquito which then picks up the virus. If that infected mosquito bites a healthy bird, that bird becomes infected.

Most people who become infected don't become ill. Some get a fever and aches, and some become very sick and may even die. Vicki Kramer, chief of the California Department of Public Health's Vector-borne Disease Section, told the Enterprise-Record Friday she wasn't surprised to see the number of human West Nile cases increasing now.

In the past, human cases have occurred from spring through October, she said, but most people who have gotten West Nile have become infected in late July and early August, she said.

It takes a while for an infection to cause symptoms (if it's going to), to be diagnosed, and to be reported to health officials, she said. Infections that occurred in late July and early August this year would be expected to be reported in late August and early September, she said.

Kramer said people are most likely to be infected during hot weather. That's partly because the life cycle of the virus inside mosquitoes speeds up when the weather is hot.

Then, the virus reproduce faster, creating more virus within mosquitoes, she said. Also, the virus has to reach a mosquito's salivary glands to make it able to cause an infection. When it's hot, the virus reaches the mosquito's salivary glands more quickly, she said.

Asked why the numbers of human cases have declined over the last few years, Kramer said several factors may be involved. The numbers can be expected to rise and fall during different periods, she said.

Kramer said people can help officials track the spread of West Nile virus by reporting any dead birds they find. The number to call to report a dead bird is 1-877-968-2473.

Health officials recommend people protect themselves by using effective mosquito repellent, especially when they are outside early in the morning and at dusk.

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