

**County of San Diego  
Employee West Nile Virus Information Sheet**

**West Nile Virus Precautions**

This is the first in a series of County employee updates to provide timely information on developments regarding the West Nile Virus. While there have been **NO** reported cases of West Nile Virus in San Diego County, this information is being offered so that you can employ some precautionary measures, especially for those employees whose duties may take them out in the field.

**West Nile Virus Information**

West Nile virus is spread by mosquitoes that bite and infect humans and other animals. Most people infected with West Nile virus have no symptoms. A few will develop fever, skin rashes, headaches and body aches. People most at risk to develop more serious illness are young children, people over the age of 50 or those with compromised immune systems. If you have questions of a medical nature or suspect you may have contracted this virus, please contact your personal physician or health care provider.

Additional information may be found by logging onto the County of San Diego Department of Environmental Health website at [www.sdcdeh.org](http://www.sdcdeh.org), click on the West Nile virus icon, and then go to Frequently Asked Questions. The Department of Environmental Health (DEH), Vector Surveillance and Control Program is the lead agency in San Diego County on mosquito disease.

**Avoid Mosquitoes**

When working in or around areas of mosquito activity, the best precautionary measure is to protect yourself from the mosquito bite. Doing the following can maximize this:

- Wear long sleeves and pants when outdoors.
- Plan outdoor activities to avoid mosquito-prone areas when mosquitoes are most active (dawn and dusk).
- Keep doors and windows closed unless screens are installed.
- Spray your clothing and exposed skin with an insect repellent containing DEET.

**Insect Repellents**

While using insect repellents is an effective measure to avoid mosquitoes, they must be used with care. The following tips are provided to provide guidance in the use of this effective measure:

- Use an insect repellent that contains DEET (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide or its synonym N, N-diethyl-3-methylbenamide). Examples of brands containing DEET include: Cutter, Off, and Repel. The percentage of DEET in the insect repellent determines the length of time that its effectiveness will last. For example;

23.8%	5 hours
20%	4 hours
6.65 %	2 hours
4.75%	1½ hours
- Follow the directions on the product container when applying and re-applying the repellent. For more information about applying insect repellants, log onto [www.epa.gov/pesticides/citizens/insectrp.htm](http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/citizens/insectrp.htm).

- Use enough repellent to cover your exposed skin. Do not apply to skin that is under clothing. Heavy application is not necessary to achieve protection.
- Do not apply to cuts, wounds or irritated skin.
- After returning indoors, wash treated skin with soap and water. Wash any treated clothing before wearing again.
- Do not apply aerosol or pump products in enclosed areas.
- Do not apply aerosol or pump products directly to your face. Spray your hands, then rub carefully over the face avoiding eyes and mouth.
- If you have a skin reaction, discontinue use. Wash the treated area and call the Poison Control Center (800) 876-4766, or seek medical attention from your personal physician or health care provider. Serious reactions to products containing DEET have been related to the **misuse** of the product (e.g., swallowing it, using over broken skin, using for multiple days without washing skin in between uses).

### **Control Mosquito Breeding**

Another measure to help prevent the spread of the West Nile virus is to eliminate mosquito breeding grounds.

- Eliminate standing water. That is where mosquitoes breed and they can do so in a puddle as shallow as a footprint. Dispose of old tires appropriately. Drain ponds and pools that are not circulating. Empty out buckets and other standing water sources. (Log onto [www.projectcleanwater.org](http://www.projectcleanwater.org) to learn how to drain pools and other water sources without polluting.)
- Use mosquito fish to control mosquitoes in decorative pools and ponds. DEH Vector Surveillance and Control Program provides these handy fish for **free**. Please call (858) 694-2888 for more information.
- Report mosquito breeding areas by calling DEH Vector Surveillance and Control at (858) 694-2888.

### **Report Dead Birds**

The West Nile virus infection is primarily a bird disease. Mosquitoes become infected by feeding on an infected bird and can pass the virus to humans, horses or other hosts when they bite. The appearance of West Nile virus in San Diego County is being monitored by the collection and testing of dead birds. Dead birds should be reported following the requirements and procedures as described below.

#### **Requirements for Pick Up and Testing**

**Only birds that have been dead for less than 24 hours can be picked up for testing.** Rotting, skeletal or maggot-ridden carcasses are not suitable for testing. If the dead bird you found fits these criteria, please call DEH Vector Surveillance and Control at the number listed below with the dead bird's location. If DEH determines the dead bird is suitable for testing, they will arrange to pick up the bird for testing. Weekend pick-ups are not available at this time.

If the dead bird is determined to not be suitable for testing or is found on the weekend, please dispose of it by using the following procedures.

#### **Disposing of Dead Birds**

There is currently no evidence the West Nile virus can be spread directly from birds to people. However, dead birds can carry a variety of diseases and should never be

handled with bare hands. To dispose of a dead bird, use plastic or latex gloves to carefully place it in a double plastic bag. Or you may use a doubled plastic bag as a glove to pick up the bird. Then wrap the bird in the bag, tie it off and place it in the outdoor trash. Wash your hands with soap and water when finished.

By employing the above measures, you will not only minimize your risk of exposure, but assist in protecting the public health of San Diego County citizens by eliminating mosquito breeding grounds and participating in monitoring the disease by the reporting of dead birds. If you have any questions, please call DEH Vector Surveillance and Control at (858) 694-2888. The phone is staffed Monday through Friday, from 7:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; a recording is available after-hours, please leave your name and phone number, and staff will return your call.