

West Nile Virus Reaches the Lake Tahoe Basin

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Local Health Departments have found evidence this year that West Nile virus has reached Lake Tahoe. A small number of dead birds here have tested positive for the disease, which has now spread across the United States. However, there is no reason to panic. The best way to prevent infection is to learn about the disease and how to protect yourself and your family from it. Here are the facts about the West Nile virus as compiled by the California Department of Health Services.

What is West Nile virus?

- West Nile virus is a mosquito-borne disease that is common in Africa, west Asia and the Middle East.
- West Nile virus was first detected in the

United States in New York in 1999. Since then, it has spread to 46 states, Canada, and Mexico.

How does someone get West Nile virus?

- People usually get West Nile virus from the bite of an infected mosquito. There is also evidence that the virus can be acquired via a blood transfusion or organ transplant from an infected donor.

What are the symptoms and treatment?

- Most people who are bitten by a mosquito with West Nile virus will not get sick. People who do become ill may experience mild to moderate flu-like symptoms, such as fever, headache and body ache. It is estimated that less than 1 percent of the people who are infected with the virus become severely ill and

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The Lake Tahoe Report airs each week on KOLO-TV News Channel 8 Tuesdays at 5 p.m. The Lake Tahoe Report weekly television segments and newspaper articles are a collaborative effort between the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension and the UC Davis, Tahoe Environmental Research Center. Funding was provided by the California State Water Resources Control Board and U.S. Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

Coauthor John Cobourn is a water resource specialist with University of Nevada Cooperative Extension. Coauthor Heather Segale is the education and outreach coordinator for the UC Davis, Tahoe Environmental Research Center. For more information, contact Heather Segale, (530) 583-3279, or logon to www.lteec.org, www.tahoe.unr.edu, or terc.ucdavis.edu.

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require hospitalization. The elderly and immunocompromised are particularly susceptible to illness caused by West Nile virus.

- Currently, there is no specific treatment for West Nile virus infection. Since it is a virus, it does not respond to antibiotics. In severe cases, hospitalization and supportive care is important.

- If you have symptoms of West Nile virus, call your doctor.

How can people protect themselves?

- Avoid spending time outside at dawn and dusk, when mosquitoes are active. They are especially active for two hours after sunset.
- When outdoors, wear long pants, long sleeve shirts and other protective clothing.
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET according to label instructions.
- Make sure that doors and windows have tight-fitting screens. Repair or replace screens that have tears or holes.

- Eliminate all sources of standing water that can support mosquito breeding. Make sure that rainstorm runoff from your property soaks into the ground in infiltration basins and dry-wells.

Why is the public urged to report dead birds?

The public is encouraged to assist in the efforts to detect and monitor West Nile virus by reporting crows, ravens, magpies, jays, sparrows, finches, or hawks that have been dead for less than 24 hours. Birds play an important role in maintaining and spreading this virus. Mosquitoes acquire the virus from infected birds, and then transmit the virus to people. Evidence of the virus in dead birds is often the first indication that West Nile virus has been introduced into a new region. The California Department of Health Services has set up a toll-free hotline for the public to report dead birds, (877) WNV-BIRD. Or, logon

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to www.westnile.ca.gov. In Nevada, call (775) 688-1180 to report dead birds. The Washoe County Health Department can be reached at www.co.washoe.nv.us/health, ElDorado County at www.co.el-dorado.ca.us/emd/envhealth/wnv, and Placer County at www.placermosquito.org/.

What are local jurisdictions doing about West Nile virus?

West Nile Virus has been found in dead birds in South Lake Tahoe, in Incline Village, and on Kingsbury Grade in Douglas County. In addition, horses have been infected with West Nile virus in areas of Nevada and Alpine Counties in California. All counties at Lake Tahoe currently have mosquito abatement programs, except Douglas County. The Douglas County Mosquito Control District does not cover Lake Tahoe and Topaz Ranch Estates.

Watch for the "Enviro Report" in the North

Lake Tahoe Bonanza each Friday, and tune

in to KOLO-TV News Channel 8 Tuesdays at 5 p.m. to learn more. "The Lake Tahoe Report" is a collaborative effort of the Lake Tahoe Environmental Education Coalition, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, UC Davis and the USDA Forest Service. For more information, contact Heather Segale, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, (775) 832-4138, or logon to www.lteec.org or www.unce.unr.edu.

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