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WEST NILE VIRUS

2003

In 2003, a mosquito pool collected on July 16th from El Centro area – Imperial County, and submitted on September 16th to the Department of Health Services laboratory tested positive for WNV. This was the first detection of WN virus in California. This finding moved the date of the first documented detection of West Nile virus in California from August 5th (Wister State Wildlife Refuge – Imperial County) - to mid July.



Culex tarsalis

BACKGROUND

West Nile virus was first isolated and identified in 1937 from an infected person in the West Nile district of Uganda. Since then, infrequent human outbreaks, mainly associated with mild febrile illnesses have been reported. Since the mid-1990s, the frequency and apparent clinical severity of WN virus outbreaks have increased.

On *September 12, 2002*, the California Department of Health Services reported the first human case of WN virus infection acquired in California, although the person reported no mosquito bites, blood transfusions or organ transplants, or travel to areas where WN virus has been detected. At that time, WN virus was not detected in California by any of surveillance tools used statewide.

It remains unknown how West Nile virus came to North America in 1999. The rapid geographic expansion of the virus and subsequent persistence in newly established enzootic (*disease affecting animals in a certain area*) areas in North America indicate that West Nile virus has become a permanent fixture of the U.S. ecological and medical landscape.