PRESS RELEASE

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SAINT LOUIS ENCEPHALITIS VIRUS DETECTED IN VALLEY MOSQUITOES FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 2003

West Nile virus detected in the west Valley for the first time this year just outside Desert Hot Springs

INDIO, CA, AUGUST 5, 2015: Six samples of mosquitoes collected from traps southeast of Mecca near Buchanan Street and Avenue 76 and Avenue 68, Johnson Street and Avenue 70, and Grant Street and Avenue 71, tested positive for Saint Louis encephalitis virus (SLE). This is the first detection of SLE in California since 2003. The Coachella Valley Mosquito and Vector Control District lab detected the virus while performing routine testing of mosquito samples. The District sent samples collected late last week to the Center for Vector-borne Diseases at UC Davis for confirmation of the SLE results, which we received Tuesday.

SLE was first detected in North America in 1933 during a large urban outbreak of the disease in St Louis. The virus is widely distributed throughout the Western hemisphere and it was the only neuroinvasive mosquito-borne flavivirus in North America until the introduction of West Nile virus in 1999.

West Nile virus (WNV) was also detected in seven samples of mosquitoes collected from traps around the Coachella Valley from both rural and urban areas. One of the positive samples came from a trap close to Desert Hot Springs near the intersection of Bubbling Wells Road and 18th Avenue – the first time WNV was detected this year in that area of Coachella Valley.

The other WNV-positive mosquitoes came from Indian Wells near Eldorado Drive and Highway 111, from La Quinta near Washington Street and Avenue 47, from Indio near Youngs Lane and Avenue 48, and from Mecca near Grant Street and Avenue 71 and near

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Johnson Street and Avenue 70. This brings the total number of West Nile virus-positive mosquitoes to 80 for 2015, the highest number of WNV positive mosquitoes detected at this time of year since WNV was first identified in the Coachella Valley.

“Before West Nile virus appeared in the Coachella Valley in 2003, the Saint Louis encephalitis and Western equine encephalitis viruses were commonly detected here,” says Jeremy Wittie, the District Scientific Operations Manager. “We don’t really know why the virus has reappeared, but we do know its detection this year has been a trend in other parts of the country, as well.

SLE is transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito just like WNV. In the Coachella Valley, the mosquito species that carry SLE – the *Culex quinquefasciatus* and the *Cx. tarsalis* – are the same mosquitoes that are able to transmit WNV. The viruses share the same symptoms. Most people infected will have no apparent illness. Initial symptoms of those who become ill include fever, headache, nausea, vomiting, and tiredness. Severe neuroinvasive disease (often involving encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain) occurs more commonly in older adults. In rare cases, long-term disability or death can result.

“Mosquito control work for both viruses is the same,” says Wittie, “so our operational work to control this virus is no different than our work to slowdown West Nile virus.”

District staff will post disease notification signs in affected communities to alert residents. Staff will set additional traps, increase larval surveillance to identify sources, and carry out larval and adult control as necessary in an effort to reduce the number of mosquitoes and interrupt further transmission of the diseases.

Residents are encouraged to be careful not to create standing water sources in their yards or irrigation runoff into street drains, and to be on the lookout for standing water sources and report them to the District. Residents are also encouraged to avoid mosquito bites by following simple personal protection measures.

**Protect yourself from mosquito bites:**

- **Apply Insect Repellent.** Use a repellent with DEET (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide), picaridin (KBR 3023), oil of lemon eucalyptus [p-methane 3, 8-diol (PMD)] or IR3535 according to the instructions on the product label. DEET products should not be used on infants under two months of age and should be used in concentrations of 30% or less on older children. Lemon eucalyptus oil should not be used on children under three years of age. **Be Aware of Peak Mosquito Hours.** Dawn and dusk are peak biting times for many mosquitoes. Consider rescheduling outdoor activities during that time.

- **Clothing Can Help Reduce Mosquito Bites.** Wear long-sleeves, long pants, and socks when outdoors to help keep mosquitoes away from skin.
Mosquito-Proof Your Home

- **Drain Standing Water.** Mosquitoes lay their eggs in standing water. Limit the number of places for mosquitoes to breed by draining/discardng items that hold water. Check rain gutters and drains. Empty unused flowerpots and wading pools. Change water in birdbaths and pet bowls at least weekly.

- **Install or Repair Screens.** Keep mosquitoes outside by having tightly-fitting screens on all of your windows and doors.

West Nile virus is the leading cause of encephalitis in the United States and is transmitted to animals and humans via the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes get infected when they feed on birds carrying the virus. Most individuals infected with WNV will not experience any illness. Others will have flu-like symptoms, such as fever, headache and body aches. In severe cases, people will need to be hospitalized, and in rare cases the disease can be fatal. Young children, the elderly, or individuals with lowered immune systems are at greater risk of experiencing severe symptoms when infected. Anyone with symptoms should contact their health care provider.

As of July 31, West Nile virus has been found in 36 counties in California, with 1,058 samples of mosquitoes testing positive for the virus and eight human cases. There have been no human cases in the Coachella Valley this year. Two human cases have been reported in western Riverside County. Please contact the District at (760) 342-8287 or (888) 343-9399 to report mosquito problems, request mosquitofish, report neglected pools or standing water where mosquitoes breed, and report dead birds. Visit us online at [www.cvmvcd.org](http://www.cvmvcd.org) to obtain more information and submit service requests. For the latest statewide statistics for WNV activity, please visit [http://westnile.ca.gov](http://westnile.ca.gov).

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