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SAFETY ALERT

No. 04-07

West Nile Virus Precautions

July 2004 (Rev 10/15)

The Greater Los Angeles County Vector Control District has noted an increase in West Nile Virus in the Los Angeles County over the last several years. West Nile Virus activity has been widespread and residents throughout the Los Angeles basin are advised to take precautions to avoid mosquito bites.

The County Department of Health Services reports that the West Nile Virus is spread to humans most commonly through the bite of a mosquito which has been infected with the virus. Most mosquitoes do not carry the virus, and the risk of serious human illness is extremely low, with more than 80% of those exposed to the virus experiencing no symptoms at all. Those that develop symptoms may experience headaches, fever, body aches, skin rash or swollen lymph glands. Staff and students who suspect they may be infected should be referred to their physician or a public health clinic.

The following measures may be taken to minimize exposure to mosquitoes:

1. All stagnant water sources should be removed to eliminate mosquito breeding. Even shallow water sources created by leaking faucets or air conditioning units can support the breeding of mosquitoes.
2. Minimize outdoor activities in areas where mosquitoes are active during the hours of dusk and dawn. If outdoors during these periods, wear protective clothing such as long sleeved shirts and long pants.
3. Insect repellants may be helpful and should always be applied in strict compliance with instructions on the label.

If a dead bird is discovered on school grounds, the following procedure should be followed:

1. Note the condition and description of the dead bird carcass, e.g, condition, color, size, etc. This information will be necessary for reporting purposes.
2. Use rubber gloves or a plastic bag to pick up the bird carcass. Do not handle dead birds with bare hands. Double bag and properly seal the bags. Gloves or any other items in contact with the carcass should also be double bagged.
3. Thoroughly wash your hands after handling the carcass.
4. Immediately call the California Department of Public Health West Nile Virus Hotline at (877) 968-2473. The Hotline Operator will ask questions regarding the bird's appearance and condition. They will determine if the bird will be tested for West Nile Virus and provide further instructions on what to do with the carcass. Not all dead bird carcass will be picked up for testing.

The Maintenance and Operations Branch publishes a Pest of the Month Newsletter that also includes information on West Nile Virus (Program No. 15, 17, 18, 19, 24, 25, 29, 32, 34 and 35) and their hosts. The newsletters can be found at <http://laschools.org/pom>.

Inquiries may be directed to the Office of Environmental Health and Safety at (213) 241-3199 or Pest Management at (213) 745-1436. Medical questions may be directed to Student Medical Services at (213) 202-7584.

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