

Opinion: West Nile virus awareness critical

By Ada Barros Heiser

The Placer Mosquito and Vector Control District is announcing the official beginning of the season during West Nile virus and Mosquito and Vector Control Awareness Week, April 19-25.

“With another mild and brief winter this year, a lot of our residents did not get much of a break from mosquitoes.” stated Joel Buettner, district manager. “Many of our residents understand the cycle of West Nile virus throughout the season, but many are also wondering how yet another dry year will affect mosquito populations.”

In past drought years, district surveillance data show very little impact on mosquito populations, but show a slight increase in West Nile virus activity. Experts believe this could be attributed to more infected birds congregating around fewer water sources, creating hotspots for bird to mosquito transmission of the virus.

“The good news is, we have not yet seen any West Nile virus activity in Placer County. This gives all our residents time to help us minimize mosquito populations by dumping out containers and eliminating drainage problems on your property. By reducing mosquito breeding locations now, we can reduce the risks associated with mosquito bites and West Nile virus later in the season” states Buettner.

The district also supports water conservation efforts, as many conservation measures also help reduce standing water in certain areas. Simple strategies such as cutting down on watering your lawn can help reduce the amount of water that goes into storm drain systems, which are a popular habitat for urban and suburban mosquitoes.

The week of April 19-25 is West Nile virus and Mosquito and Vector Control Awareness Week in California. Mosquito control districts throughout the state are gearing up for what could be an unpredictable and unusual season. The Placer Mosquito and Vector Control District is enlisting the public's help to slow down the West Nile virus cycle this season. Residents can do a variety of things to help the community. Among these things are reporting potential mosquito sources or unusual mosquito behavior, such as mosquitoes biting during the daytime. Residents can also help identify high-risk areas for West Nile virus by reporting dead birds to the California Dead Bird Hotline at 877.968.2473.

In 2014, Placer County had seven human cases of West Nile virus, including one fatality, 40 dead birds that tested positive for the virus, and 77 virus-positive mosquito samples.

Ada Barros Heiser works for Placer County.