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Health officials confirm first 2016 West Nile case in Riverside County

A 73-year-old woman who lives in western Riverside County is the first confirmed human case of West Nile Virus in the county this year, said Dr. Cameron Kaiser, county public health officer.

The illness was confirmed this week based on test results and other clinical information. The patient was hospitalized, but has been released and is expected to recover.

The virus is transmitted to humans and animals through a mosquito bite. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. Health officials emphasized that the risk of serious illness to humans is low. Most individuals who are infected with the virus will not experience any illness. Elderly individuals and those with compromised immune systems are at greatest risk for serious illness.

“While West Nile is rarely life-threatening, it can be occasionally serious,” Kaiser said. “Unlike the common cold which is easily transmitted, the West Nile virus can only be spread by mosquito bites, and there are easy steps to take to reduce your risk of getting bitten.”

Here are some ways to protect yourself:

- Wear long pants, long-sleeved shirts and other protective clothing outside.
- Apply EPA-registered insect repellent that contains DEET.
- Make sure doors and windows have tight-fitting screens. Repair or replace screens that have tears or holes.

--Eliminate all sources of standing water on your property, such as old tires, buckets, flower pots and toys that can support mosquito breeding.

There were 138 confirmed and probable cases in Riverside County last year and six deaths, although that figure includes instances in which the patient had the illness but it could not be determined if West Nile was the cause of death.

A comprehensive surveillance program to monitor the virus in Riverside County has been established by the Department of Environmental Health's Vector Control Program, local mosquito and vector-control districts and other state and local agencies.

Anyone who becomes ill after exposure to mosquitoes should contact their health care provider. The Disease Control office can be reached at 951.358.5107 for more information on West Nile Virus. If you have concerns about mosquitos in your area, contact the local vector control district.