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May 27, 2004

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Thomas L. Garthwaite, M.D. 
Director and Chief Medical Officer

 Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D., M.P.H. 
Director of Public Health and Health Officer

SUBJECT: **WEST NILE VIRUS ACTIVITY SUMMARY REPORT**

On April 27, 2004, the Board approved a motion by Supervisor Antonovich, directing the Directors of Health Services and Public Health, to implement the Department's planned West Nile Virus awareness and surveillance program and to provide monthly updates. This is the first update.

BACKGROUND

West Nile Virus (WNV) has emerged in the United States as a disease of significant public health importance. Since the first bird and human cases occurred unexpectedly in New York City in 1999, environmental surveillance now has identified WNV in nearly all of the contiguous United States (46 states and the District of Columbia) and human cases were reported from 45 states—including California in 2002. Nationwide, the incidence of WNV disease has soared from 66 confirmed cases and 9 deaths in 2001 to nearly 10,000 cases and 262 deaths in 2003. In 2002, the first locally acquired human case of WNV in California was identified in our county, and in 2003 one case of WNV fever was acquired in Los Angeles County, very late in the season.

While in 2004, to date, no human cases have been identified either locally or nationwide, the number of human cases is expected to multiply this season. Already, initial indicators of WNV activity have been documented earlier than expected in the United States.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY WNV SURVEILLANCE ACTIVITIES—2004

Locally, as of May 21, 2004, dozens of WNV-infected dead crows and 2 positive mosquito pools have been identified. The County's five local mosquito and vector control districts (districts) have stepped up mosquito control, surveillance and education activities and the State continues to test dead birds. The districts continue to conduct surveillance through testing of sentinel chicken flocks and mosquito pools located throughout the County.

We believe that the entire County is at risk this year for WNV. However, because the preponderance of dead crows and positive mosquitoes to date have been from the San Gabriel Valley and East Los Angeles, Acute Communicable Disease Control staff have initiated active surveillance at hospitals in these areas, to identify any patients whose symptoms may indicate WNV.

An electronic message was sent through the Health Alert Network to approximately 4500 physicians and other health professionals on May 19, 2004, informing them of the tests in crows and reminding them to consider WNV as a potential cause of encephalitis. They were informed that testing for WNV is available at the County's Public Health laboratory.

The upcoming issue of our publication, *The Public's Health*, which will be sent to over 33,000 physicians and health professionals in the next two weeks, features WNV as a front-page article.

COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE PUBLIC

On April 27, 2004, the Board approved a motion designating the week of May 3 – 9, 2004 as "Mosquito and Vector Control and West Nile Virus Awareness Week," in the County.

The State issued a news release on WNV during the first week in May and we provided comments to local media.

On May 20, 2004, the Department held a press conference with the San Gabriel Valley Mosquito and Vector Control District, to warn residents to protect themselves from mosquitoes. We received coverage in both English- and Spanish-language media.

We continue to update our website with information and warnings about WNV.

If there are any human cases or significant developments, we will alert you immediately, prior to our next monthly update. In the meantime, if you have any questions or need additional information, please let us know.

TLG:JEF:cp
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c: Chief Administrative Officer
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors