NEWS

From Supervisor Gary Ovitt Fourth District, San Bernardino County

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE April 19th, 2005



For information, contact Mark Kirk (909) 387-4866

Board Approves Ovitt's Recommendations Helping to Prevent a Dangerous West Nile Season

San Bernardino- Low-cost test kits that will allow San Bernardino County public health officials to know almost immediately if West Nile Virus is present in the county are among the recommendations from Supervisor Ovitt's West Nile Rapid Response Team that were approved by the Board of Supervisors today.

Until now, public health officials have had to send trapped mosquitoes to a lab in Northern California and wait about three weeks before learning if the insects were carriers of the deadly virus.

"These new test kits will allow public health officials to take immediate action instead of allowing disease-carrying mosquitoes to bite and breed for three weeks," said Supervisor Ovitt.

The recommendations approved by Supervisor Ovitt and his colleagues on the Board of Supervisors will help better educate and protect the community from a potentially dangerous season.

"Due to record rainfall this winter and warmer weather, it's crucial that all residents know what precautions are being taken to protect them from this potentially deadly virus," said Supervisor Ovitt. "In addition, residents need to be reminded of how they can help protect themselves and their families."

The allocation of \$130,000 for the County Rapid Response Team will create an awareness campaign to educate the general public of potential dangers that arise from West Nile Virus.

This will be in addition to the low-cost test kits, which will allow County Vector Control and the West Valley Mosquito and Vector Control District to test mosquito samples locally. Quickly identifying positive samples through local testing was one of several recommendations that came from Supervisor Ovitt's West Nile Rapid Response Team.

"To have the resources to test our mosquito pools locally will give us an advantage in protecting the public," said San Bernardino County Public Health Director Jim Felten. "Recommendations from this Rapid Response Team will help save lives."

"By identifying positive samples quickly, we can inform residents of hot spots before they spread," said Supervisor Ovitt. "By sending these samples out for testing in the past, we've had to wait as long as three weeks before we had a response. Now we can know of infected areas almost immediately and then work to contain the problem and protect the public."

The awareness campaign will provide information through mailings to impacted communities within the county, and provide a toll-free phone number for the public to report potential mosquito breeding sources.

The County Rapid Response Team was created this past March by the Board of Supervisors at Supervisor Ovitt's request to immediately deal with West Nile related issues in affected areas of the county.