

# WEST NILE VIRUS HITS LOS ANGELES

**You may not live anywhere near southern California; but there is information here which you should consider. Unless you take precautions, your personal health could be affected, regardless of where you live in America.**

West Nile Virus is becoming an epidemic throughout the United States. Since the virus first appeared in New York in 1999, more than 16,000 people have become ill; and, as of October 2004, 622 have died.

With 750 cases in California this year and 20 deaths, that state has become a special target for this disease.

Greater Los Angeles has been especially hit hard. Of the 266 cases in Los Angeles County this year, the San Gabriel Valley experienced most of them, with 101 cases. The southeast portion of the county followed, with 71 cases. The San Fernando Valley had 69 cases.

“It’s the new polio,” said James J. Rahal, a professor at the Cornell University Weill College of Medicine in New York. “It’s a devastating complication. The West Nile Virus can cause the same paralysis, and pathology as polio!”

Of the 1,951 people infected this year in the United States, 37 percent developed paralysis, encephalitis and meningitis—complications that can lead to death.

In Los Angeles County, 44 percent of the 266 residents, diagnosed with the virus as of October 7, suffered the neuroinvasive complications. Forty-four percent!

Of these 116 cases, 73 suffered meningitis; 39, encephalitis; and four, paralysis. Eight of the pa-

tients died. This was the most of any county in the entire state of California.

As of October 8, the latest updated figures reveal that 300 have been diagnosed with the virus throughout Los Angeles County.

Jonathan E. Fielding, the county’s health officer, said, “It appears that, at least, the neuroinvasive diseases are more serious and can cause a higher frequency of continuing problems than was originally thought.”

He added, “If you look at the fatalities, they tend to be in older people, but in terms of the neuroinvasive cases [which damage the nervous system], there was a significant number who in early and middle adulthood who have been affected.”

It is now recognized that West Nile Virus is more virulent in America than in its native Africa. This is due to the fact that, in Africa, children contract the infection and, by adulthood, are immune to it.

The disease is carried by crows, other birds, and transmitted to humans by mosquitoes—including the common *Culex*, which is all over America. Fortunately, most people only experience mild, flu-like symptoms or none at all.

There is no cure for the virus, other than living a very healthy life and avoiding mosquito bites.

Since March 2001, the disease has rapidly spread from east of the Mississippi all the way to the West coast. It is predicted that northern California will be hit harder by the virus next year.

Although mosquito season normally tapers off with cooler weather in the fall, people in southern California can contract the virus all year long, because of milder winters.

## FROM THE FOURTH EDITION OF OUR NATURAL REMEDIES ENCYCLOPEDIA

**SYMPTOMS**—*Mild case*: Light illness (fever, headaches, body aches). *Serious*: The virus begins with a low-grade fever and diarrhea. About a week later, it can develop into encephalitis (brain infection). Permanent brain damage or death can result if others in your area are contracting the disease. Dead birds, especially crows, are another indication. It is in the elderly that the disease spreads to the nervous system and bloodstream.

**CAUSES**—This is an inflammation of the brain which is commonly found in Africa, West Asia, and the Middle East. It is caused by viruses transmitted by mosquitoes. The Middle East strain of the disease entered the U.S.

through New York in 1999. Of those with severe illnesses, about 3% to 15% die. Fatalities generally occur from 55 years of age, onward.

Stay indoors at dawn, dusk, and early evening. When outside, wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants. Eliminate standing water around your home. Because mosquitoes can bite through thin clothing, you might spray clothing with repellents containing permethrin or DEET. (An insecticide with 35% DEET is best; higher than that provides no additional protection.) Insecticides are dangerous! Do not put them on the hands of children; for they may put them in their mouths or touch their eyes. Install window and door screens. (*Regarding DEET, read p. 559 and be warned!*)

—See *Mosquito Bite* (560) and *Viral Infections* (227).