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City Readies for West Nile Virus Season

Fight The Bite Campaign Rolls Out for 2006

San Francisco, CA—Last year, 19 Californians died and 935 became ill from West Nile Virus (WNV), a serious disease spread through infected mosquitoes. Three San Franciscans were stricken with the illness in 2005, but none of the cases were locally acquired. Many expect this year to involve more illness in Central and Northern California, particularly due to the excessively wet winter and late spring storms. In San Francisco, city officials are gearing up for another year of prevention action.

Working on the success of the popular *Fight the Bite* campaign that helped launch West Nile Virus awareness throughout California, local authorities have once again joined forces to educate the public about West Nile Virus and its prevention. The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC), SF Environment, Department of Public Health, Department of Public Works and the Recreation & Park Department are focusing their efforts on keeping San Franciscans safe from mosquitoes and reminding residents to eliminate stagnant water where mosquitoes breed.

“San Franciscans will be at risk for West Nile Virus both in San Francisco and through travel during the summer and fall when mosquito activity is at its peak,” observed Rajiv Bhatia, MD, Medical Director for Environmental Health at the San Francisco Department of Public Health. “We know that West Nile Virus has already been identified in birds as close as San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties. Even in San Francisco, there are pockets of mosquito breeding areas that pose a threat to the public. This disease is preventable and it takes all of us working together to keep ourselves and our families protected.”

The San Francisco Department of Public Health is attacking WNV from both an environmental and a surveillance perspective. The Department’s Environmental Health section is available to help enforce issues such as standing water and mosquito control. The Disease Control section has already issued new laboratory forms and directives on diagnosis, testing and treatment to the City’s healthcare providers and labs. City agencies have increased their monitoring of city parks, reservoirs, and public areas.

“We are once again asking San Franciscans to be vigilant about mosquito and mosquito bite prevention,” said Mitch Katz, MD, Director of Public Health. “The very young, the elderly and anyone with a weakened immune system need to be particularly cautious. Like sunburn, West Nile Virus is completely preventable. A little prevention goes a long way in keeping everyone safe.”

Fight the Bite campaign materials have become available in seven languages and state and local city employees are busy identifying new ways to distribute WNV materials to the City’s diverse populations. Community groups and individuals may request these materials through www.sfmosquito.org or by calling 415/252-3806.

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Fight the Bite San Francisco campaign materials recommend the following methods to reduce the likelihood of getting bitten by an infected mosquito:

- Eliminate all sources of standing water where mosquitoes can breed.
- While outdoors at dawn and dusk, wear long pants and shirts.
- Apply insect repellent to exposed skin according to label instructions
- Report significant mosquito activity to DPH at San Francisco WNV Info Line: 415/252-3806
- Report dead birds to the State at 1/877-WNV-BIRD.

For more information, the public can go to the following sources:

www.sfmosquito.org and www.westnile.ca.gov.

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