I've Been Bitten By A Mosquito ... Should I Be Concerned About West Nile Virus? By now, almost everyone has heard about West Nile Virus (WNV), which causes an illness spread by mosquitoes that was first identified in the United States in 1999. WNV activity in California increased significantly during 2004, with 829 cases reported statewide, including 27 deaths. In Orange County, there were 64 confirmed human WNV infections, with four deaths. It is not possible to accurately predict the impact WNV will have on Orange County during 2005, but WNV infection is expected to again be

- a significant public health concern. While medical professionals are still learning about WNV, here are a few facts about the illness:
 - While the number of WNV cases in California was much higher in 2004 than in previous years, the actual number of WNV cases is low when compared to a common illness like influenza.
 - The chance of being infected with WNV from a single mosquito bite is also very low.
 - Less than one percent of people infected with WNV will get severely ill. Most people with WNV infection will have no symptoms or only mild flu-like symptoms.

There is no specific treatment for WNV infection and there currently is not a WNV vaccine available for people. You should seek medical care immediately if you develop symptoms such as:

- High fever
- Confusion
- Muscle weakness
- Severe headaches
- Stiff neck

People who spend a lot of time outdoors are at increased risk for getting WNV infection. However, people most at risk for severe WNV infection are people age 50 and older. Pre-existing medical conditions like diabetes or cancer, which may affect the body's natural protection against infection, may also increase a person's risk for severe infection.

Controlling mosquitoes is the key to reducing the risk of West Nile virus infection. Eliminate standing water on and around your property in which mosquitoes may breed. Even small amounts of water in cans, flower pots, puddles and old tires can serve as mosquito breeding areas. To prevent mosquito bites, use insect repellents with DEET (N, N-diethyl-meta-toluamide), wear long sleeved shirts and long pants and limit outdoor activities around dawn and dusk when mosquitoes may be most active.

If you need more information on controlling mosquitoes, contact the Orange County Vector Control District at (714) 971-2421 or view their website at www.ocvcd.org.

