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Public Health

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June 4, 2004

Dear Medical Providers in Los Angeles County:

**SUBJECT: UPDATE ON ENCEPHALITIS AND MENINGITIS SURVEILLANCE
AND THE 2004 WEST NILE VIRUS SURVEILLANCE PROGRAM**

West Nile virus (WNV) has arrived in Los Angeles County! Dead crows infected with WNV were found as early as February of this year. And within the past two weeks of May, dozens of dead WNV-infected crows as well as two WNV-infected mosquito pools were found in the San Gabriel Valley and eastern Los Angeles County. This rapid increase in WNV-infected dead birds is a strong warning that human cases will be following soon. While to date, no human WNV cases have been identified, last year, one case of laboratory-confirmed WNV infection was found in a resident of our county.

We remind all clinicians, infection control practitioners, and laboratory directors that **all cases of acute encephalitis and meningitis (including viral, bacterial, fungal, and parasitic etiologies) are reportable under California Code of Regulations section 2500 to the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services within 1 working day by telephone (888-397-3993), by fax (888-397-3778), or mail.**

A new WNV reporting form (attached) is required for free testing of specimens of suspected WNV cases—instructions for submitting specimens are described on page 2 of the form. If the form is completed in full and if specimens are submitted according to instructions, prior approval for testing IS NOT NEEDED FOR ASEPTIC MENINGITIS OR ENCEPHALITIS CASES. However, prior approval is still required for specimen testing of suspect West Nile fever cases.

In an effort to increase human WNV infection surveillance in our county, Acute Communicable Disease Control (ACDC) is requesting **all physicians to submit cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) and serum samples for WNV testing of all patients hospitalized or evaluated in an emergency department or other health care setting for aseptic meningitis, encephalitis, or acute flaccid paralysis syndrome (atypical Guillain-Barré syndrome).** The Los Angeles County Public Health Laboratory (PHL) will also offer PCR testing for enterovirus and herpes simplex virus for CSF specimens submitted from patients with aseptic meningitis and encephalitis for WNV diagnostics. Also this year, ACDC and the PHL will accept serum specimens from patients diagnosed with possible **West Nile fever** whose symptoms last at least 7 days and who are diagnosed by a medical provider.

Our PHL is certified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to conduct arboviral testing of serum and cerebrospinal fluid specimens for WNV, Saint Louis encephalitis virus, and Western equine encephalitis virus. These tests are free of charge. For 2004, all cases of encephalitis (any age) and aseptic meningitis (any age) can be tested for evidence of WNV infection. However, **WNV specimens will not be processed without a completed West Nile Virus Case History Form (attached)**. We have enclosed directions for obtaining consultation and specimen collection. If the WNV Case History Form is completed in full, **PRIOR APPROVAL BY AN ACDC PHYSICIAN OR NURSE IS NOT NECESSARY FOR SPECIMEN TESTING OF ASEPTIC MENINGITIS OR ENCEPHALITIS CASES**. Prior approval is still required for testing of specimens from suspected West Nile fever cases.

ACDC staff are available for any questions regarding WNV prevention, surveillance activities, and test interpretation at (213) 240-7941. The Los Angeles County Department of Health Services will continue to provide updated surveillance data to the medical community as new information becomes available. More information on WNV and the other arboviral encephalitides can be found on our web site <http://lapublichealth.org/acd/VectorWestNile.htm>

Sincerely,



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LM:RC:sr

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