

# STATE OF COLORADO

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*Dedicated to protecting and improving the health and environment of the people of Colorado*

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Colorado Department  
of Public Health  
and Environment

## MEMORANDUM

To: Files  
From: John Pape, Epidemiologist, Communicable Disease Epidemiology Program  
Date: October 3, 2001  
RE: 1999/2000 Encephalitis Summary

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Mosquito-borne arbovirus activity has been almost completely absent in Colorado since 1995. The one exception was a probable case of California group encephalitis in a nine year-old Mesa County boy in 2000. No chicken, horse or human specimens tested positive for Western equine (WEE) or St. Louis (SLE) encephalitis during these two years.

The California group encephalitis case followed closely after a special CDC SLE study detected, for the first time, California group viruses circulating in wild birds and mosquitoes in Mesa County in 1997 and 1998. The child, who had no history of recent travel, became ill in \_\_\_\_ 2000 with a clinically diagnosed case of viral encephalitis. Serologic studies demonstrated a high antibody titer against California group viruses but did not document a four-fold rise in titer. No additional cases have been reported to date.

The big news in mosquito-borne encephalitis was the outbreak of West Nile virus (WNV) in New York City in the fall of 1999. This virus had never previously been seen in the Western Hemisphere. As a result, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) established grants for states to develop nation-wide WNV and arboviral surveillance. Colorado was awarded grant funding to enhance the existing encephalitis surveillance program and add WNV surveillance. The majority of the grant money was used to upgrade the Weld County Health Department laboratory. Additional funding was provided to local health departments for costs in maintaining sentinel chicken flocks. In addition to SLE and WEE, the WCHD and State labs now test all chickens, horses and humans specimens for WNV. Testing of mosquito pools and dead bird carcasses should be available by the 2002 transmission season.

In 1999, Otero County joined the program bringing a total of 22 sentinel chicken flocks in 13 counties. In 2000, a couple counties reduced their number of flocks but Prowers County added a flock in SE Colorado. Thus in 2000, 20 sentinel chicken flocks were maintained in 12 counties.