The Alameda County Mosquito Abatement District urges county residents to remain vigilant about the risk of contracting West Nile Virus (WNV).

This year's outbreak of the mosquito-borne illness in California has been the worst in several years. As of last week, the virus was reported in 40 counties with 216 human cases and 10 virus-related deaths. Last year, California had 158 human cases of WNV including nine fatalities.

Alameda County has seen an increase in WNV-infected dead birds, particularly dead crows, jays and birds of prey, this year compared to last, although no human or horse cases have been reported so far.

County residents have reported more than 400 dead birds, including some in Castro Valley. Of those, 86 were tested and 13 were found positive for WNV, along with one tree squirrel.

“West Nile Virus activity has increased nationwide this year,” said District Entomologist Bruce Kirkpatrick. “We have increased our surveillance and control efforts throughout the County to address the increased risk this mosquito season.”

Most people who become infected with WNV do not experience symptoms or become ill. Only about one out every 150 people infected develop a more severe form of the illness. Adults over 50 years old and people with compromised immune systems are at increased risk of serious complications from WNV infection.

Anyone who develops symptoms such as a high fever, confusion, muscle weakness, severe headaches or stiff neck should seek medical care immediately.

Health officials urge residents to reduce the risk of contracting all mosquito-borne diseases by following these guidelines:

• Dump and drain standing water on your property – that is where mosquitoes breed.

• Limit outdoor activities at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes or most active and wear clothing that reduces skin exposure.

• Use insect repellent containing active ingredients such as DEET, Picaridin, IR3535, and Oil of lemon eucalyptus.

• Keep door and window screen in good repair.

If you come across a dead bird or tree squirrel report it by calling (877)WNV-BIRD or online at

www.westnile.ca.gov.