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NEWS RELEASE

March 3rd 2010,

The Shasta Mosquito and Vector Control District Expand their Tick-borne Disease Surveillance Program.

This winter, the Shasta Mosquito and Vector Control District are conducting weekly surveys of tick populations throughout the District's nearly 1,100 square mile area. Twenty sites, such as parks and campgrounds, where people are likely to enter tick habitat have been checked weekly since November by District personnel. Ticks are collected and brought back to the District's lab to be identified, sorted and counted. These ticks are preserved to be tested by agencies such as Shasta County Public Health, the California Department of Public Health, and by researchers interested in determining the type and range of diseases spread by ticks in California.

Ticks are small arthropod relatives of mites and spiders that feed exclusively on the blood of vertebrate animals. Ticks take several blood meals in their lifetimes and can pick up and spread several diseases by feeding on the blood of infected host animals and transporting those pathogens to uninfected hosts. Surveys currently conducted by the District are focused on three common types of "hard" ticks that are likely to feed on large mammals such as deer, dogs and humans. These ticks have the potential to spread such diseases as anaplasmosis, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and Lyme disease.

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Our Mission: To protect the public's health and quality of life from diseases and nuisance, through a comprehensive program of mosquito control, and by providing information on all organisms which transmit disease or cause physical nuisance (vectors).

"The District has been conducting limited tick surveillance since 2007, but the implementation of weekly surveillance of tick sites is a dramatic step to improve our knowledge of the level of health risk that these critters pose for the residents in our area," according to District Biologist, John Albright.

"Shasta County residents can take simple precautions to prevent tick bite related ailments such as Lyme disease. After venturing outside to enjoy the day, residents can make thorough checks of themselves, their pets and their children," said the District Manager Peter Bonkrude. "This and simply being aware of the presence of ticks in our area can go a long way to reducing potential exposure risk."

Ticks, mosquitoes, and other small creatures in the environment that can spread disease to humans or other animals are known as "vectors". The District focuses primarily on surveillance and control of mosquitoes during the warmer, drier times of the year. The adult ticks being collected, on the other hand, prefer cooler temperatures and damp conditions to encourage their active host-seeking behavior.

Hungry ticks looking for a blood meal hang onto the tips of grass and twigs alongside trails with their legs outstretched to latch onto passing vertebrate "victims". District personnel use this "questing" behavior to collect ticks by dragging a cloth through tick habitat areas (flagging), or by looking for ticks on vegetation adjacent to these trails.

The District has been quite active during the winter of '09-'10. They have begun early season surveillance of standing water habitats that will soon be breeding mosquitoes. Brush clearing to improve access to those habitats has also been done by District personnel and California Department of Forestry inmate crews.

For more information and advice the public is invited to check out the District's newly updated and improved website at: www.shastamosquito.org

For more information on Ticks and Tick-borne diseases:

California Department of Public Health

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/TickBorneDiseases.aspx>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/ticks/diseases/>

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Our Mission: "To protect the public's health from vector-borne disease and nuisance, through a comprehensive mosquito and vector control program focused on innovation, experience and efficiency."