



**COUNTY OF NEVADA  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY  
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

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January, 2016

RE: Sentinel Chicken Program

Dear County of Nevada Resident,

For the past 10 years the County of Nevada Vector Control Program has strategically placed chickens in certain areas of Nevada County to serve as a warning signal for mosquito-borne diseases. Termed "Sentinel Chickens," these are standard, run-of-the-mill chickens purchased at a young age when they haven't had the chance to be exposed to Encephalitis viruses. Placed six-to-a-cage in 4 "flocks" strategically located throughout the county; these chickens provide information, gathered through routine blood tests; that disease-carrying mosquitoes are in the vicinity.

As a 'Host' you would be providing the space and the day to day care and oversight that would be given to any normal flock of chickens. If there are any problems with the chickens we would ask you to alert us immediately. The Vector Control Program provides a temporary cage, chickens, feed and a watering system. We come once a week to check feed and every other week we will draw samples to test their blood for the presence of antibodies to SLE and WEE as well as West Nile viruses. The chickens arrive late April and are blood tested once every two weeks during the months of May through early November. After the last testing date, Vector Control staff will pick up the cage and equipment by mid-November. The chickens are yours to keep.

Although some birds, most notably corvids, or crows, are fatally susceptible to West Nile Virus; chickens are unaffected by WNV or any other of the Encephalitis viruses found here in Nevada County. They do, however, develop antibodies, which show up in their blood approximately 10 days after infection. Blood is drawn and tested every two weeks to check for the presence of these antibodies. An initial "Reactive" result, which means the chicken may have been infected, sends the Vector Control back out to draw blood from a vein on the underside of the chickens' wings and is tested. If secondary testing is "Positive", the results obtained are used to increase inspections and control measures in areas where viral activity is present. This data is collected and used over time to develop treatment strategies for the County.

It is important to note that there is no direct transfer of these diseases to humans via contact with the sentinel chickens or consumption of eggs and any 'positive' birds pose no direct health concern. This only alerts us the presence of disease-carrying mosquitoes that would be in the area regardless. We recommend following the normal precautions one would take to "Fight the Bite". Vector Control personnel are able to provide you with more detailed information about protecting yourself and your family from the risk of Mosquito-borne diseases at your request or go to [www.westnile.ca.gov](http://www.westnile.ca.gov).

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