



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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TO: Washington Equine Producers

FROM: Leonard E. Eldridge, DVM
State Veterinarian

We are taking the opportunity to notify horse owners participating in premises registration that the West Nile virus (WNV) season will soon be upon us. Although the first confirmed case of WNV in a horse last year wasn't reported until August 1st, there is no guarantee it will take that long for it to show up this year.

Last year, 179 WNV cases were reported nationwide. Washington led the nation with 41 horses testing positive for the disease: 26 horses in Yakima County; 10 horses in Grant County; four horses in Benton County; and one horse in Kittitas County. WNV is spread by mosquitoes that have fed on an infected bird. The disease can sicken people, horses, many types of birds, and other animals. It is not spread from horses to other animals or people. Nearly all of the horses that contracted WNV last year did not have current vaccinations.

WNV is fatal in about one-third of all horses that contract it, although most horses do not become ill and show no symptoms at all. Those that do become ill show signs such as loss of coordination, loss of appetite, confusion, fever, stiffness, and muscle weakness particularly in the hindquarters.

Horse owners should contact your veterinarian for advice for vaccination recommendations and WNV control measures. The vaccine requires two doses the first year of vaccination two to four weeks apart. Immunity will not be achieved until three to five weeks after the second vaccination, so it's important to avoid waiting until mosquito season is in full swing. An annual booster dose should be administered prior to the start of the mosquito season.

Mosquitoes can breed in any puddle that lasts more than four days. The best way to reduce your risk is for horse owners to take measures to reduce mosquito populations. Precautions include removing standing water from yards and barns and changing water in troughs or bird baths that could be a source of mosquito breeding.

For more information on WNV, please visit the Washington State Department of Health WNV website at: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/WNV.html>. Veterinarians who learn of potential WNV cases in horses or other animals should contact the State Veterinarian's Office at (360) 902-1878.