

Four Colorado Horses Infected with West Nile Virus in 2012

Four equine cases of West Nile Virus (WNV) have been diagnosed in Colorado as of August 2nd, 2012. The WNV positive horses are from Fremont, Weld, and Montrose counties.

West Nile virus is a disease that threatens the health of humans, horses, and other animals. “This is the time of year when we are most likely to see WNV cases reported in horses,” said Colorado State Veterinarian, Dr. Keith Roehr. “It is difficult to project how many WNV cases we may see in the coming months.”

The transmission of the disease varies from year to year and depends on a number of factors, including mosquito numbers. The West Nile virus can be carried by infected birds and then spread locally by mosquitoes that bite those birds. The mosquitoes can then pass the virus to humans and animals.

Infected horses may display symptoms including head tilt, muscle tremors, stumbling, lack of coordination, weakness of the limbs or partial paralysis. If horses exhibit clinical signs consistent with WNV, it is very important for horse owners to contact their veterinarian in order to confirm the diagnosis through laboratory testing. Horse owners should consult their private practicing veterinarian to determine an appropriate prevention strategy for their horses.

Vaccines have proven to be a very effective prevention tool. Horses that have been vaccinated in past years will need an annual booster shot. However, if an owner did not vaccinate their animal in previous years, the horse will need the two-shot vaccination series within a three to six week period.

In addition to vaccinations, horse owners also need to reduce the mosquito populations and their possible breeding areas. Recommendations include removing stagnant water sources, keeping animals inside during the bugs’ feeding times, which are typically early in the morning and evening, and using mosquito repellents.

For complete and updated information concerning new WNV equine case information including numbers and location of test positive horses visit:

- <http://www.fightthebitecolorado.com/>
- <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/dc/zoonosis/wnv/>

“It is important to protect your horse through WNV vaccination and good management practices,” said Roehr.