

Contact: Name
Organization
Telephone Number

For Immediate Release

Day of Week, X, 2003

OWNERS ENCOURAGED TO PROTECT HORSES FROM WEST NILE VIRUS

(Name, title and local health department, county public health nursing service or environmental health service) said (Day of Week) that horse owners in (Name) County need to prepare now to protect their animals from West Nile Virus.

(Last Name) said the warning has been issued by Colorado Department of Agriculture officials, who are emphasizing that about 378 horses in the state were diagnosed with West Nile virus in 2002 and more are predicted to have the disease this year. Of the horses infected last year, 99 died.

Dr. Wayne Cunningham, the state veterinarian who is based at the Colorado Department of Agriculture, said, "It's important for horse owners to consider vaccinations or booster shots before the temperature and climate make conditions ideal for mosquitoes to spread the disease."

Cunningham said that horses that were given the two-shot vaccinations last year will need a booster shot in April. If owners didn't vaccinate their animals last year, those horses will need the two-shot vaccination within a 3- to 6-week period.

"This year, we also are recommending that all horses get an additional booster vaccination in July," said Cunningham. "Although these shots won't prevent some horses from getting clinical signs, it does help the horses' chances of surviving the disease."

At this time, there are no West Nile virus vaccinations for pets, such as dogs and cats, which also are susceptible to the disease, Cunningham said. However, concerned pet owners need to consult with their veterinarians if their pets are exhibiting unusual symptoms, the state veterinarian said.

Cunningham explained, to protect both horses and companion animals, owners should consider methods of controlling mosquito populations on their property, such as eliminating standing pools of water where bugs can breed and keeping their animals inside during the morning and evening when mosquitoes are more likely to be feeding.

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He said that West Nile virus can cause an inflammation of the brain and is transmitted by mosquitoes that can infect people and animals. Although both humans and animals have died from the disease, most West Nile virus infections do not cause any illness in either humans or animals.

Cunningham said that horses infected with the virus do not transmit it to humans or other animals. Clinical symptoms seen in infected horses include an elevated temperature, stumbling, lack of coordination, weakness of the limbs or partial paralysis.

According to Cunningham, of the unvaccinated horses that exhibit clinical signs from the infection, one of three will most likely die from the infection. The symptoms of West Nile virus are similar to Western Equine Encephalitis, which owners typically vaccinate their horses against, he said.

The Department of Agriculture's Rocky Mountain Regional Animal Health Laboratory can test equine serum for West Nile virus. The fee is \$4.75 per sample with results within 48 hours. Samples must be sent to CDA-RMRAHL, 2331 W. 31st Ave., Denver, Colo., 80211.

For more information on West Nile Virus, visit the Internet at www.ag.state.co.us or the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Web site at www.aphis.usda.gov/oa/wnv/index.html.