

What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a mosquito-borne virus that causes encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) and/or meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord).

WNV is spread from bird to bird by mosquitoes, when they bite, or take a blood meal, from birds that are infected with the virus. Mosquitoes are also capable of spreading the virus to horses, humans, and other mammals.

Most horses bitten by carrier mosquitoes do not develop disease. Of those that do, approximately one-third develop severe disease and die or are so affected that euthanasia is required. The incubation period, or the time between the bite of an infected mosquito and when clinical signs appear, ranges from seven to 14 days.

Typical signs of WNV include: ataxia (incoordination, stumbling, limb weakness) that either appears suddenly or appears gradually and worsens, sleepiness, dullness, listlessness, facial paralysis (droopy eyelids, lower lip), and inability to rise. Some horses may develop mild fever, blindness, muscle trembling, seizures, and other signs.

Horses cannot spread the disease directly to humans, but humans are susceptible to the disease if bitten by a carrier mosquito.

A **vaccine** is available as an aid in control of WNV in horses.

What is Potomac Horse Fever?

Potomac horse fever is caused by a parasite *Neorickettsia risticii*. *N. risticii* found in fresh water snails, infects the larva of 17 species of insects, including mayflies, caddis flies and dragonflies, living in and around fresh water where contaminated snails are found. Horses cannot acquire Potomac horse fever by ingesting snails or by drinking contaminated water. Only by consuming infected insects can they become infected.

Horses may become infected while grazing near water sources when they ingest insects carrying the parasites, but recent cases have occurred in horses that were not housed near water.

Clinical signs are variable but may include: **fever**, mild to severe **diarrhea**, depression, lethargy, laminitis, mild **colic** and decreased abdominal sounds. The disease is seasonal, occurring between late spring and early fall in temperate areas, with most cases in July, August and September at the onset of hot weather.

Vaccination to protect horses against Potomac horse fever is available. While no vaccine is 100% effective, horses vaccinated against Potomac horse fever have lower incidence of disease and milder symptoms.

Information provided by Thoroughbred Times, American Association of Equine Practitioners, www.equinewestmile.com, and Michigan Department of Agriculture.

BUGS!

What is Eastern/Western Equine Encephalomyelitis?

Eastern equine encephalomyelitis (EEE) or Western equine encephalomyelitis (WEE), also known as “sleeping” sickness, is caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system. Horses, people, birds, and a variety of small mammals can contract this disease from a mosquito bite. Mosquitoes spread the virus among wild birds. These birds serve as a reservoir of infection for other animals and mosquitoes act as the transmission vector to horses and people. The disease is not spread from horse to horse or from a horse to a human directly. An effective vaccine for horses is available and recommended to protect them from EEE/WEE.



Next month we will discuss the “weighty” issue of laminitis, overweight horses and pasture management.

Insect Control Tips

- Keep horses stabled during dawn and dusk
- Place horses in the barn/stable under fans
- Turn off lights that attract insects at night
- Keep screens on stable windows
- Eliminate breeding areas, like shallow stagnant water and puddles
- Use fluorescent lights, which do not attract mosquitoes
- Empty water collecting in buckets, tarps or tires
- Clean water troughs once a week
- Use mosquito repellent
- Remove old and/or wet manure
- Clean up feed and hay spills, and water drainage ditches
- Use fly baits and other methods to control existing adult insects

Flies have been linked to the spread of numerous diseases including: Pigeon fever, Influenza, Salmonella, Strangles, Vesicular stomatitis, and *E. coli*.

Feed-through fly preventive is available. It can safely and dramatically reduce the number of flies around horse operations *because it prevents immature flies from developing into adults.*

- Horse manure is a breeding ground for house and blood-feeding stable flies.
- Manure from one horse can yield up to 27,000 flies each day.
- Pesticide sprays and other control methods repel or kill flies only after they’ve become adults.

Information provided by Pfizer Animal Health, distributor of Solitude IGR.

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