

West Nile Virus in Livestock

Spring 2003-2005

Navajo Nation Veterinary and Livestock Program



What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus is a mosquito-spread disease that affects birds, humans, and horses. West Nile Virus is carried by birds and spread to other animals by mosquitoes. West Nile virus infections generally occur during warm weather months when mosquitoes are active.

How is it spread?

Horses are the main animals susceptible to the West Nile Virus. West Nile Virus does not usually affect animals other than horses and other equine. West Nile Virus is not a contagious disease from horse to horse so there is no quarantine issued for this disease.

Signs and symptoms of WNV infection in horses may include:

One of the first signs usually is head droop, loss of coordination, stumbling, or staggering, circling, weakness or paralysis of limbs, inability to stand, muscle twitches or tremors, apparent blindness, lip droop, grinding teeth, and death. These signs are not specific for WNV infection, and may be caused by other diseases including rabies. A new vaccine is now available to protect horses against the West Niles Virus. Horse owners should contact their local Navajo veterinary clinic for any additional questions:

- Two doses of the vaccine given three weeks apart are required.
- Following the second dose, it will be about three weeks until the immunity reaches protective levels.
- Plan 6 weeks in advance to gain the appropriate protection levels.
- Use an insect repellent for horses. Premise sprays for stables.

Mosquitoes become infected with WNV by feeding on infected birds. There is no evidence that a person can acquire the disease by handling live or dead birds or other infected animals. The NNVLPP encourages the public to take precautions such as utilizing insect repellent and limiting standing water around homes to cut down on mosquito breeding sites.

To reduce the risk of becoming infected with WNV, people should:

The Navajo Veterinary & Livestock Program would like to prevent the likelihood of this disease. Take precautions for yourselves and your horses. Should you see any horses with the previously described signs and symptoms or a large number of dead birds or horses in one location, please contact the nearest Navajo Nation Veterinary Clinic.

What should I do if I see a dead bird?

- ❖ Only birds of the magpie, jay, raven and crow families will be tested if collected within 12 hours of death. Do not freeze. Double bag in plastic. Wear gloves or use a shovel. Do not touch the dead bird with your hands.
- ❖ Report large numbers of bird deaths to your nearest IHS Office of Environmental Health, Navajo Nation Veterinary Clinic, Fish & Wildlife Department or Parks & Recreation Department
- ❖ Birds that have been dead greater than 12 hours should be buried.
- ❖ Navajo Veterinary & Livestock Program (928) 871-6615
- ❖ NN Health Education Program (928) 871-6258
- ❖ West Nile Hotline: (602) 364-4500 or the AZ Dept. of Health: (602) 230-5917
- ❖ AZ WNV website: www.hs.state.az.us