

West Nile Virus



Q. What are the signs and symptoms of West Nile Encephalitis in horses?

A. In horses that become clinically ill, the virus infects the central nervous system and causes symptoms of encephalitis. Clinical signs of encephalitis in horses include loss of appetite and depression, in addition but not limited to any combination of the following signs:

- Weakness of hind limbs
- Paralysis of hind limbs
- Impaired vision
- Defective muscular coordination
- Head pressing
- Aimless wandering
- Convulsions
- Inability to swallow
- Circling
- Hyper excitability
- Listlessness
- Coma
- Change in behavior
- Colic

It is important to note that not all horses with clinical signs of encephalitis have West Nile encephalitis. Other diseases – including rabies, botulism, equine protozoal myeloencephalitis and other mosquito-borne viral encephalitic diseases of horses caused by Eastern, Western and Venezuelan viruses – can cause a horse to have symptoms similar to West Nile Virus (WNV). Only laboratory tests can confirm the diagnosis of West Nile Encephalitis.

Q. Is there treatment for West Nile Encephalitis in horses?

A. Currently, there is no specific treatment for West Nile Encephalitis in horses. Supportive veterinary care is recommended. Most horses will recover from the infection. Long-term side effects have been anecdotally reported.

Q. How can I prevent mosquitoes from affecting my horses?

A. There are some easy steps you can take to prevent mosquitoes from affecting your horses:

- Vaccinate appropriately and booster as needed.
- House horses indoors during peak periods of mosquito activity (dusk to dawn).
- Avoid turning on lights inside the stable during the evening and overnight. Mosquitoes are attracted to incandescent bulbs that glow yellow.
- Place incandescent bulbs around the perimeter of the stable to attract mosquitoes away from the horses.
- Remove all domestic birds (including chickens) that are inside or close to the stable.
- Periodically look around the property for dead birds, especially crows.
- Eliminate areas of standing water on your property. Shallow standing water, used tires, manure storage pits and drainage areas with stagnant water are ideal mosquito breeding places.
- Topical preparations containing mosquito repellents are available for horses. Read the product label before using, follow all instructions and consult your veterinarian.
- Fogging of stable premises can be done in the evening to reduce mosquitoes; read directions carefully before using.

Q. Can a horse with WNV infect horses in neighboring stalls?

A. No. There is no documented evidence that WNV is transmitted from horse to horse. However, if at all possible, horses with suspected WNV should be isolated from mosquitoes and tested for the virus, since multiple horses, on the same premises, can be infected.

Q. Where can I find additional information regarding the vaccine?

A. Consult your veterinarian for information about the West Nile virus vaccines, Recombitek® and West Nile-Innovator®, which are currently available and for their appropriate use.

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