

Horses and West Nile virus

How can your horse get West Nile virus?

Horses become infected with WNV after being bitten by an infected mosquito. There is no evidence that horses can transmit WNV to other horses, birds, or people.

Signs and Symptoms:

In horses that do become clinically ill, the virus infects the central nervous system and causes symptoms of encephalitis. Horses infected with West Nile virus may display one or more of the following:

- Lack of coordination and stumbling.
- Depression or uneasiness.
- Weakness of the hind limbs.
- Falling down, inability to rise.
- Muscle twitching.
- Grinding teeth and or droopy lower lip.
- Colicky appearance.
- Excessive sweating.
- Disorientation, aimless wandering or circling.
- Convulsions.
- Paralysis.
- Failure to eat or inability to swallow.
- Impaired vision.
- Hypersensitivity.



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 (EPM), and other mosquito-borne viral encephalitic diseases of horses caused a horse to have symptoms similar to WNV. If you are concerned your horse may be exhibiting signs of encephalitis do not hesitate to call your veterinarian.

Vaccines:

Currently, there are four vaccines available against West Nile virus. It is imperative that horses are vaccinated according to the label on the vaccine. At least one yearly booster is recommended after the first initial series. Please consult with your veterinarian for more information.

Protection and Prevention:

Maintain your horse's immune system by keeping them current on vaccines, parasite control, and proper nutrition. A weak immune system may leave your horse susceptible to infections from West Nile virus.

Reduce breeding sites:

- Throw out old tires, tin cans, buckets, drums, or any water holding containers
- Fill in or drain any low places in pastures and yard.
- Keep drains, ditches, and culverts clean of weeds and trash, so water will drain properly.
- Cover trash containers to keep out rainwater, and drill holes in bottom so water can drain out.
- Clean out and refill watering troughs weekly.
- Turn over wheelbarrows.
- Keep grass cut short and shrubbery trimmed, so adult mosquitoes will not hide there.
- Repair leaky pipes and outdoor faucets.

Currently, there is no specific treatment for West Nile encephalitis in horses. Supportive veterinary care is recommended.