



# STATE OF IDAHO

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### ELMORE COUNTY HORSE TESTS POSITIVE FOR WEST NILE VIRUS

(BOISE) A horse in Elmore County has tested positive for the West Nile virus, the Idaho State Department of Agriculture announced today.

West Nile Virus (WNV) was discovered in 15 of Idaho's 44 counties in 2005, infecting thirteen people along with at least 113 horses.

Since the introduction of equine vaccines, the number of horses reported with West Nile infections has decreased dramatically nationwide, from 15,000 horses in 2002 to 1,341 in 2004 and 1,100 in 2005 according to the USDA.

"Almost all of the 113 Idaho horses diagnosed with WNV last year were not vaccinated. Our advice to horse owners is to make sure that their horses are protected, and if not, they should contact their veterinarian immediately," said Dr. Marilyn Simunich, a veterinarian at the Idaho State Department of Agriculture.

The most common sign of WNV in horses is weakness, usually in the hindquarters. Weakness may be indicated by a widened stance, stumbling, leaning to one side and toe dragging. In extreme cases, paralysis may follow. Fever is sometimes evident, as are depression and fearfulness. Lip smacking, chewing movements and fine muscle tremors may be noticed.

Humans cannot contract West Nile through contact with an infected horse.

The case serves as a reminder of the importance to vaccinate horses against the virus and for people to take appropriate steps to protect themselves against mosquito bites. In Idaho, the appearance of equine cases has preceded cases in humans by 3-4 weeks.

West Nile virus is an infection spread by mosquitoes. The virus was first discovered in 1999 in the New York City area. Since then, the virus has spread westward and can be found throughout the country. People and animals are generally infected through the bite of a mosquito.

To protect themselves, people are advised to:

- Reduce standing water on their property that provides mosquito breeding habitat, such as bird baths and decorative ponds;
- Apply insect repellent approved by the EPA to exposed skin and clothing. Follow instructions on the product label, especially for children;
- Avoid mosquitoes when they are most active at dawn and dusk;
- Report dead birds to your local Fish and Game office.

The Idaho State Department of Agriculture's Urban Pest Management program also has information available on steps you can take to prevent home-grown mosquito infestations. Information is available on ISDA's Web site at <http://www.idahoag.us>.