



STATE OF IDAHO



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IDAHO STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE RECOMMENDS WEST NILE VACCINE FOR HORSES

(BOISE) The Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) recommends taking precautions to protect equines (horses, mules, asses and zebras) and small camelids (llamas, alpacas, vicunas, guanacos) against the West Nile virus (WNV).

Confirmed cases of WNV in humans and horses in ten southern Idaho counties confirm the presence of WNV-carrying mosquitos. The first positive mosquito pools of 2012 were detected in mid-July and the first confirmed human case shortly afterward. Three cases in horses have been confirmed in the past several days. Additional information about the virus and a map of known affected counties is available from the Department of Health and Welfare's Web site at <http://westnile.idaho.gov>.

West Nile was first discovered in birds 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 generally are infected through the bite of an infected mosquito. Animals affected with West Nile virus cannot transmit the virus to another horse or human.

The most common sign of West Nile virus 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 and inability to stand may follow. Fever sometimes is evident, as are depression and fearfulness. Additionally, lip-smacking, chewing movements and fine muscle tremors may be noticed.

Since the introduction of WNV 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 U.S. Department of Agriculture. In 2005, the ISDA Animal Health Lab, which tests for West Nile virus, found over 110 positive horses. Ninety-eight percent of the horses that tested positive for West Nile had never been vaccinated or were inappropriately vaccinated. Approximately 35 percent of these WNV-positive horses died or were euthanized.

“Although the vaccines are not a 100 percent guarantee, they are the best way to help prevent West Nile infection in horses,” said Dr. Marilyn Simunich, a veterinarian with ISDA. “More vaccine choices are available now; horse owners should have their veterinarian determine which is best for each horse. Llamas and similar small camelids can be affected by West Nile Virus, too, so speak to your veterinarian about preventative measures for your llamas and alpacas.”

Horses that have never been vaccinated for WNV will initially need two doses. The booster is typically administered a minimum of three weeks after the first dose. Maximum immunity from the vaccine typically is achieved six weeks after the first dose. An annual booster vaccination is recommended in subsequent years.

As with most mosquito-borne diseases, control of the mosquito is very important to reduce the risk of being infected. The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, ISDA, and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game developed the “Fight the Bite” brochures to inform the public, horse owners and hunters on what they can do to prevent mosquito bites and the transmission of West Nile virus. The information is provided in English and Spanish at <http://westnile.idaho.gov>

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.agri.idaho.gov/Categories/Pesticides/urbanPest/indexurbanPest.php>

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