



# STATE OF IDAHO

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE RECOMMENDS WEST NILE VACCINE FOR HORSES**

(BOISE) The Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) is recommending equine owners have their horses vaccinated against the West Nile virus.

To date, the ISDA Animal Health Lab, which tests for West Nile virus, has tested 106 horses. Of those, 62 horses have tested positive for West Nile. Most of the horses that tested positive for West Nile had not been vaccinated.

"Although the vaccines are not a 100 percent guarantee, they are an excellent way to help prevent West Nile." said Dr. Marilyn Simunich, a veterinarian with ISDA.

For three years, ISDA, the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game have been sending "Fight the Bite" brochures throughout Idaho, informing the public, horse owners and hunters on what they can do to prevent mosquito bites and the transmission of West Nile. The information is provided in English and Spanish.

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. In Idaho during 2004, there were 22 horses diagnosed with West Nile virus.

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 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.

West Nile 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.

Additional information about the virus is available from the Department of Health and Welfare's website 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 website at <http://www.idahoag.us>.

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