

West Nile Virus confirmed in two Delaware horses

DOVER, Del. – The Office of the State Veterinarian announced today Delaware's first and second cases of West Nile Virus (WNV) found in horses in 2018.

The first infected horse is a 3-year-old Standardbred mare residing in Kent County. The horse began showing signs of wobbling and staggering on August 19. Samples were submitted to the National Veterinary Services Laboratory, which confirmed the diagnosis of WNV on August 24. No vaccination history was available for the horse. The horse has shown slight improvement in clinical signs.

The second infected horse is a 2-year-old Thoroughbred mare also residing in Kent County. This horse was evaluated by a veterinarian on August 25 and found to have a fever, mild wobbling and staggering, droopy eyelid, difficulty controlling muscles of the mouth and throat, and depression. Cornell University Animal Health Diagnostic Center tested samples and confirmed WNV infection on August 28. This horse was not up-to-date on its WNV vaccine. The attending veterinarian has not reported any improvement in this horse's condition.

West Nile Virus and Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) are diseases transmitted to horses via the bites of mosquitoes. Humans can also be infected with WNV and EEE, but transmission requires a mosquito bite and the virus cannot be directly transmitted between horses, or between horses and people. Signs of infection in horses include fever (although not always with WNV), anorexia, head pressing, depression or personality change, wobbling or staggering, weakness, blindness, convulsions, muscle spasms in the head and neck, or hind-limb weakness. If owners notice any of these signs in their horses, they should contact their veterinarian

immediately. Two cases of WNV were confirmed in Delaware horses in 2017.

The Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control's (DNREC) Mosquito Control Section has seen an increase of WNV found in wild birds and sentinel chickens this year throughout the state. Three detections of EEE, two in Sussex and one in New Castle County, have been made in sentinel chickens in the last month. So far in Delaware in 2018, two cases of WNV have been found in humans.

The State Veterinarian urges horse owners to contact their veterinarians as soon as possible, as we are in the midst of peak mosquito season, to have horses and other equines vaccinated against WNV and EEE. Neither disease has a specific drug treatment, and EEE infections in horses are fatal in 70 to 90 percent of cases, and WNV in 30 percent of cases.

Horse owners can take several additional steps in the barn and around the farm to help protect horses from mosquito bites. Horses should be kept inside during dawn and dusk, which are peak hours for mosquito activity. Topical insect repellents labeled for use on horses may be applied. The wind generated by fans installed in horse stalls can also help deter mosquitoes. Old tires and containers should be disposed of and standing water eliminated. Water troughs or buckets should be emptied, cleaned, and refilled every 2-3 days if possible to remove any mosquito eggs or larvae.

For more information about WNV or EEE:

- Human health questions should be directed to the Delaware Division of Public Health, (888) 295-5156, or (302) 744-4990.
- Animal health questions should be directed to the Delaware Department of Agriculture at (800) 282-8685 (Delaware only) or (302) 698-4500. Ask for the Poultry and Animal Health Section.
- Questions about the state's mosquito control program or mosquito biology should be directed to the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control's Mosquito

Control Section at (302) 739-9917.

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