WEST NILE VIRUS (WNV)

QUICK FACTS

Since rearing its ugly head in 1999 and rapidly spreading from coast to coast, WNV has become the leading cause of arbovirus encephalitis in horses and humans in the United States.

- Transmitted by mosquitoes or other biting insects
- Endemic in all areas of North America
- Causes inflammation of the brain and spinal cord (encephalomyelitis)
- Incubation period is 7-10 days
- Mortality rates can reach over 30 percent
- Infected horses are not contagious
- All horses should be vaccinated every year

West Nile Virus Continues to be a Threat to You and Your Horse

Almost all cases are in unvaccinated horses or horses with unknown vaccination histories.

- 2017 equine cases reported: 307
- 2016 equine cases reported: 377
- 2015 equine cases reported: 225
- 2017 human cases reported: 2,002
- 2016 human cases reported: 2,149
- 2015 human cases reported: 2,175

Watch for These Signs

- Depression
- Low-grade fever (101.5°F-103.5°F)
- Lack of appetite
- Change in behavior
- Muscle fasciculations (twitching)
- Incoordination/ataxia
- Head tilt, ear droop, difficulty swallowing
- Recumbency (inability to rise)
- Colic
- Death

Diagnosis

- Diagnosis is based on clinical signs and confirmed with a blood test.

Treatment and Recovery

- There is no cure for WNV. Supportive care is focused on systemic support, managing inflammation and avoiding further injury.
- Recovery is possible. Of the horses that do survive, about 60-80% experience a full recovery.

COST OF WNV VACCINATION: ≈$25-$100
COST OF WNV SUPPORTIVE CARE: $1,000’s

Prevention

Vaccination is the No. 1 way to protect your horse:

- Initial vaccination, followed by a booster in 3-4 weeks. Yearly vaccination thereafter
- More frequent boosters may be recommended in areas with year-round mosquito seasons or for immune-compromised horses

Minimize your horse’s exposure to mosquitoes:

- Use insect repellents frequently
- Stable horses at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active
- Eliminate or minimize standing water on property
- Stock tanks or ponds with mosquito-feeding fish
- Remove organic debris and items in which standing water can collect

The Science of Healthier Animals

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