

The West Nile Virus

West Nile Virus (WNV) first appeared in North America in 1999. This mosquito-borne virus can infect many different animal species but **crows, jays, humans and horses are at higher risk.**

Ontario first detected WNV in birds and mosquitoes in 2001. Evidence of the virus was found throughout the province in 2002 and, by fall, **both human and horse WNV infections were confirmed.**



For further information about West Nile Virus and horses contact:

Ontario Ministry of
Agriculture and Food
www.gov.on.ca/omaf

Agricultural Information
Contact Centre
1-877-424-1300

Northern Ontario
Regional Office
1-800-461-6132

Ministry of Health and
Long Term Care
www.gov.on.ca/health

Ministry of Health INFOnline
1-800-268-1154
(toll-free in Ontario)
416-314-5518 (Toronto)
TTY **1-800-387-5559**

*Or your local public
health unit.*



West Nile Virus

Protect Yourself
and Your
Horse



Signs of West Nile Virus

Often the first signs of WNV in a region are **unexplained bird deaths**. Report any unusual sightings of dead crows or jays to your local public health unit.

WNV infection in horses affects the central nervous system. Symptoms range from listlessness, trembling, depression, loss of appetite, stumbling and loss of coordination, weakness, head tilting and partial paralysis, to convulsions and even death. Fever occurs in 25% of cases. These symptoms can appear very rapidly and are similar to other nervous system diseases including rabies and equine encephalitis. Up to one-third of all horses showing clinical signs of WNV will die.

Consult your veterinarian immediately if you observe any symptoms of WNV or other nervous system disease in your horse. Your veterinarian will begin supportive treatment, collect samples and request laboratory tests to identify causes of disease. In the case of death, a post mortem examination and follow-up testing is recommended.

Should WNV be detected in your area, be aware that **the infection is spread through mosquito bites**. There is no evidence that the virus can be directly transmitted to people from infected birds or horses. Persons infected with WNV usually experience mild flu-like symptoms, however, the virus can cause severe illness and even death. The elderly and individuals whose immune systems are already compromised by another disease condition are at higher risk.



Practical Advice for Horse Owners

WNV is a serious emerging disease. You should take precautions to protect both yourself and your horse.

Consult your veterinarian about **vaccinating your horse** for WNV and other diseases.

Eliminate potential mosquito breeding areas on your property. Clean up and empty containers of standing water such as old tires or barrels. Change water in troughs and birdbaths frequently. Clear leaves, twigs and other debris from rain gutters and drainage ditches.

Add extra protection to avoid mosquito bites. Use flyspray, a flysheet and flymask on your horse.

Refrain from outdoor activities during peak mosquito activity times at dawn and dusk.

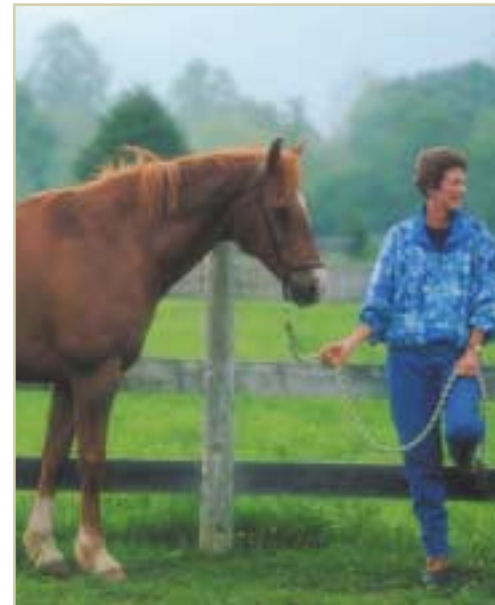
Protect yourself by wearing light coloured long sleeved shirts and long pants. **Use a mosquito repellent containing DEET** (N,N-diethyl-m-toluamide). Be careful to follow all label directions for use.

WNV Vaccine

A WNV vaccine, available through your veterinarian, has been fully approved for use in horses. Initial studies indicate the vaccine is at least comparable to other killed equine vaccines in safety and efficacy.

Vaccination Protocol

The initial vaccination requires two injections three to six weeks apart followed by an annual booster. A booster vaccination every six months is recommended for horses at higher risk. For full protection, vaccinations should be initiated two months prior to the start of the mosquito season.



Talk to your veterinarian about a complete vaccination program to protect your horse from WNV and other diseases.