

OAKLAND COUNTY HEALTH DIVISION



West Nile Virus Questions and Answers About Horses



Q. Has West Nile Virus caused severe illness or death in horses?

A. Yes, while data suggest that most horses infected with West Nile Virus recover, results of investigations indicate that West Nile Virus has caused deaths in horses in the United States.

Q. How do horses become infected with West Nile Virus?

A. The same way humans become infected—by the bite of infectious mosquitoes. The virus is located in the mosquito’s salivary glands. When mosquitoes bite or “feed” on the horse, the virus is injected into its blood system. The virus then multiplies and may cause illness. The mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds or other animals.

Q. How does the virus cause severe illness or death in horses?

A. Following transmission by an infected mosquito, West Nile Virus multiplies in the horse’s blood system, crosses the blood brain barrier, and infects the brain. The virus interferes with normal central nervous system functioning and causes inflammation of the brain.

Q. Can I get infected with West Nile virus by caring for an infected horse?

A. West Nile virus is transmitted by infectious mosquitoes. There is no documented evidence of person-to-person or animal-to-person transmission of West Nile Virus. Normal veterinary infection control precautions should be followed when caring for a horse suspected to have this or any viral infection.

Q. Can a horse infected with West Nile Virus infect horses in neighboring stalls?

A. No. There is no documented evidence that West Nile Virus is transmitted between horses. However, horses with suspected West Nile Virus should be isolated if at all possible.

Q. My horse is vaccinated against Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE), Western Equine Encephalitis (WEE), and Venezuelan Equine Encephalitis (VEE). Will these vaccines protect my horse against West Nile Virus infection?

A. No. EEE, WEE, and VEE belong to another family of viruses for which there is no cross-protection.

Q. Can I vaccinate my horse against West Nile Virus infection?

A. A West Nile Virus vaccine is available for horses. Discuss horse vaccine with your veterinarian.

Q. How long will a horse infected with West Nile Virus be infectious?

A. We do not know if an infected horse can be infectious (i.e., cause mosquitoes feeding on it to become infected). However, previously published data suggest that the virus is detectable in the blood for only a few days.

**For more information on West Nile Virus contact
1-877-377-3641**

**or visit our website at www.oakgov.com/health
L. Brooks Patterson, Oakland County Executive**



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