

NEWS RELEASE

July 13, 2022

For Immediate Release

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Time to Protect Against West Nile Virus

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department reminds you to protect yourself and your horses against West Nile Virus (WNV) by taking steps to prevent mosquito bites and getting horses vaccinated. There is no vaccine for humans. The most common symptoms in humans are fever, body aches, and fatigue that can last for weeks or months. Less often, people develop severe illness such as swelling in the brain or spinal cord leading to weakness, paralysis, or death.

Per the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, the signs and symptoms of West Nile Virus in horses include loss of appetite, depression, fever, quivering muscles, and weakness of limbs. Infected horses may or may not show signs or symptoms.

“West Nile Virus is spread when a mosquito carrying the virus bites a person, horse, or other animal,” explains Melissa Propp, Clinic Manager for SWNPHD. “It is not spread through coughing, sneezing, touching or other close contact. This means the best protection from West Nile Virus is to prevent mosquito bites.”

The following tips can be used to help prevent the spread of WNV:

- Use insect repellent with recommended active ingredients.
- Wear long sleeves and long pants, especially if you will be out during dawn and dusk.
- Check your property for standing water and remove or drain it.
- Use mosquito dunks in standing water that cannot be drained, such as birdbaths, ponds, troughs, or other water sources. These products are safe for animals, birds, fish, and people.
- Vaccinate horses in the spring for WNV.
- House horses indoors during dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active.
- Avoid turning on lights in the barn and use incandescent bulbs around the perimeter of the stable.

SWNPHD provides data about possible WNV in the health district by trapping mosquitoes and sending them in for testing. The public will be notified of any mosquito pools that test positive for West Nile, and any positive cases in humans or horses. Horse owners should contact their veterinarian for additional information on WNV.

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. The website swhealth.ne.gov contains many resources and additional information helpful to prevent disease, promote and protect health. You can follow us on Facebook and Instagram. For questions about WNV, call 308-345-4223, one number three locations (McCook, Imperial & Ogallala), Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department.

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