

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD, AND FORESTRY

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September 6, 2017

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Horse Owners Encouraged to Vaccinate Against West Nile Virus

Animal Industry Services of the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry is encouraging horse owners to take precautions and vaccinate their animals to protect against the West Nile Virus (WNV) and Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE).

In years past, Oklahoma averaged approximately 40 cases per year of positive diagnoses of mosquito-carried diseases in horses. There were no reported human deaths in 2016; however, the state health department recently reported the first human West Nile death in 2017.

The bird population serves as the reservoir for the viruses and mosquitos then transmit the virus to horses and humans. Mosquitos most likely to transmit WNV and EEE lay their eggs in small pools of standing water. Once the adult mosquito hatches, they can become infected with both WNV and EEE after feeding on an infected host, such as a bird carrying the virus. Within 10 to 14 days, the mosquito can transmit the virus to both humans and horses.

“Signs of West Nile Virus include weakness, fever, incoordination, seizures, blindness and difficulty getting up,” said Assistant State Veterinarian Michael Herrin, D.V.M. “There are several vaccines available, and we are encouraging horse owners to visit their veterinarians and determine the vaccination protocol that will best fit their operations.”

Oklahomans can reduce the risk of both EEE and WNV by eliminating standing water which serves as a breeding area for mosquitos. Horse owners are encouraged to not let water stagnate in birdbaths or water tanks, and keep unused equipment that can collect water, such as a wheelbarrow, turned over when not in use. Water troughs should be emptied and flushed twice a week to remove potential mosquito eggs. When possible, owners should reduce horses’ outdoor exposure at dawn and dusk, the times of day when mosquitos carrying the viruses are most active.

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