



# STATE OF IDAHO



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## **FIRST HORSES OF THE YEAR TEST POSITIVE FOR WEST NILE VIRUS**

(BOISE) The Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) reports two horses, one near Parma, Idaho, and one near Meridian, Idaho, tested positive for West Nile virus (WNV). The discovery of a WNV-positive-horses means WNV-carrying mosquitoes were in the area. This serves as a reminder to the public that they are also at risk, and to protect themselves and their animals from mosquitoes and the diseases they can carry.

The ISDA recommends taking precautions to protect equines (horses, mules, burros and zebras) and small camelids (llamas, alpacas, vicunas, guanacos) against WNV by using fans and repellants to keep mosquitos away and by keeping livestock up to date on their WNV vaccinations.

The most common sign of WNV in horses is a fever and weakness, usually in the hindquarters; sometimes seen as a widened stance, stumbling, leaning to one side and toe dragging. Depression and other mental conditions such as fearfulness, lip-smacking, chewing movements and fine muscle tremors may be noticed. In extreme cases of WNV infection, paralysis and inability to stand may follow.

Since the introduction of WNV vaccines, the number of horses reported with West Nile infections has decreased dramatically nationwide, from 15,000 horses in 2002 to 1,341 in 2004 and 1,100 in 2005, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In 2005, the ISDA Animal Health Lab, which tests for WNV, found over 110 positive horses. Ninety-eight percent of the horses that tested positive for West Nile had never been vaccinated or were inappropriately vaccinated. Approximately 35 percent of these WNV-positive horses died or were euthanized. Almost each year since the virus entered Idaho in 2004, positive horses have been found.

"Although the vaccines are not a 100 percent guarantee, they are the best way to help prevent West Nile infection in horses," said Dr. Marilyn Simunich, a veterinarian with ISDA. "More vaccine choices are available now; horse owners should have their veterinarian determine which is best for each horse. Llamas and similar small camelids can be affected

by West Nile Virus, too, so speak to your veterinarian about preventative measures for your llamas and alpacas.”

Horses that have never been vaccinated for WNV will initially need two doses. The booster is typically administered a minimum of three weeks after the first dose. Maximum immunity from the vaccine typically is achieved six weeks after the first dose. An annual booster vaccination is recommended in subsequent years.

West Nile Virus is a potentially life-threatening disease to people. If you become infected after being bitten by a mosquito carrying WNV, you may experience fever, nausea, headaches, body aches, swollen lymph glands, or a skin rash. In some cases, people experience paralysis and even death.

As with most mosquito-borne diseases, control of the mosquito is very important to reduce the risk of being infected. The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, ISDA, and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game developed the “Fight the Bite” campaign to inform the public, horse owners, and hunters on what they can do to prevent mosquito bites and the transmission of WNV. The information is provided in English and Spanish at <http://westnile.idaho.gov>

Following these guidelines can help reduce your chance of getting infected with WNV:

- Avoid mosquitoes, especially between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active.
- Get rid of standing water on your property, or change it at least once a week. That old tire swing might be fun for the kids and that bird bath may look pretty, but if they have water in them, they are a perfect breeding ground for the mosquitoes that carry the WNV.
- Apply DEET or another EPA-approved insect repellent to exposed skin and clothing. Carefully follow instructions on the product label, especially for children.
- Cover up exposed skin when you’re outside.
- Insect-proof your home by repairing or replacing damaged screens.

Last year, 17 Idahoans were infected with WNV. In 2006, Idaho led the nation in West Nile Virus infections with more than 1,000 infections, which contributed to 23 deaths.

Additional information about the virus and a map of known affected counties is available from the Department of Health and Welfare’s Web site at <http://westnile.idaho.gov>.

West Nile was first discovered in birds in 1999 in the New York City area. Since then, the virus has spread westward and can be found throughout the country. People and animals generally are infected through the bite of an infected mosquito. Animals affected with West Nile virus cannot transmit the virus to another horse or human.

The Idaho State Department of Agriculture’s Urban Pest Management program also has information available on steps you can take to prevent home-grown mosquito infestations. Information is available on ISDA’s Web site at:

<http://www.agri.idaho.gov/Categories/Pesticides/urbanPest/indexurbanPest.php>

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