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Subject: DATCP News: First Case Of Equine West Nile Virus Appears In Wisconsin; Not Too Late To Vaccinate, Says State Veterinarian

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First Case Of Equine West Nile Virus Appears In Wisconsin; Not Too Late To Vaccinate, Says State Veterinarian

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MADISON – It's not too late to vaccinate horses for West Nile virus and to reduce their exposure to this and other mosquito-borne diseases, the state veterinarian says, in the wake of Wisconsin's first confirmed equine case of WNV this year.

The 10-year-old quarter horse in Grant County suffered the first signs of West Nile virus infection on July 27 and died on July 28. It was not vaccinated against WNV. Wisconsin Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory reported the positive test results Friday, Aug. 3.

"This is about when we usually start hearing about West Nile and equine encephalitis," says State Veterinarian Dr. Robert Ehlenfeldt. "It's not surprising that this case occurred in one of the few areas of the state that's had more than enough rain this summer, and likely some large mosquito hatches."

He adds, "Most horse owners have gotten the message and are vaccinating their horses, which probably accounts for the dramatic declines we've seen in West Nile cases since the first couple of years we had it. But there are always some who think they'll beat the odds. It's best to get the vaccinations in spring before mosquitoes start hatching, but you can still do it now – remember mosquito season can stretch all the way into November in a warm fall."

There are several different vaccines available for West Nile. Most of them can be purchased from a veterinarian and injected by the horse owner, but Ehlenfeldt says, "We always recommend that veterinarians administer vaccinations and get a look at the animal to check for clinical signs -- especially this late in the season, when most mosquito-borne infections could already be present."

In 2002, the first year that equine WNV appeared in Wisconsin, there were 166 confirmed cases among horses in the state, with 35 deaths. Each year since then, there have been 15-21 cases of equine WNV in Wisconsin.

WNV generally has about a 35 percent mortality rate in horses. A more deadly mosquito-borne disease is Eastern equine encephalitis, which kills 90-100 percent of its victims.

Both diseases cause similar symptoms: stumbling, lack of coordination, limb weakness and partial paralysis. Other symptoms may include depression, appetite loss, drooping eyelids and lower lip, weakness, twitching, aimless wandering, circling and blindness.

Along with vaccination, Ehlenfeldt recommended removing standing water where mosquitoes breed and keeping animals inside from dusk to dawn as the best means of preventing West Nile virus and equine encephalitis.

Veterinarians who suspect West Nile virus should notify the Division of Animal Health in the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (608-224-4872) or the U.S. Veterinary Services office 608-270-4000 in Madison.

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