

**News Release**  
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**HORSE OWNERS WARNED TO BE ON GUARD AGAINST  
MOSQUITOES, WEST NILE VIRUS**

Commissioner of Agriculture Walt Helmick is warning horse owners to control mosquitoes around their animals to minimize the chance of their equines contracting West Nile Virus (WNV) and equine encephalomyelitis. West Nile is particularly virulent in horses, although not always fatal.

“Many insects, including mosquitoes, are likely to become active with the early warm weather we’ve experienced,” said Commissioner Helmick. “The most important thing farmers can do is to eliminate standing water around barns and other places where animals gather and mosquitoes breed. Eliminating old tires or poorly draining areas can go a long way toward protecting your horses.”

Mosquitoes breed only in standing water, so drying out potential mosquito nurseries is critical to keeping their population in check.

He said that acting now – before vegetation becomes too thick – can make it easier to spot potential problem areas and correct them before mosquito populations explode. He also recommended that people contact their local veterinarians about getting their horses vaccinated against West Nile and Equine Encephalomyelitis.

Currently, no drugs exist to treat WNV specifically in horses. Treatment for an infected horse consists of supportive therapy to prevent the animal from injuring itself. WNV cases are uncommon in humans, but in rare cases it can cause serious illness due to inflammation in the brain, spinal cord or nerves.

Animal owners should consult their veterinarians if an animal exhibits any neurological symptoms such as a stumbling gait, facial paralysis, drooping or disinterest in their surroundings. Currently, there are live-animal tests for WNV in horses and chickens, but none for other animals, although testing can be done on any dead animal.

The WNV and Equine Encephalomyelitis vaccine for equines initially requires two doses administered three-to-six weeks apart. The vaccine takes four-to-six weeks from the second dose for optimal effectiveness. Horse owners should consult with their veterinarians to choose a re-vaccination schedule to protect their horses effectively. It is also recommended that if horses are vaccinated in the spring, a late summer booster should be administered for optimum protection.

Mosquitoes can cause other serious disease in humans. Besides controlling mosquito breeding grounds, when mosquito contact is likely, it is advisable to wear long pants, long sleeves and an insect repellent containing DEET, Picaridin, oil of lemon, eucalyptus or ir3535.

WNV has been present in the United States since 1999 and is carried by mosquitoes that have bitten infected birds. An infected mosquito can then spread WNV to birds, humans, horses and other animals. WNV cannot be spread from one person to another.

*The West Virginia Department of Agriculture protects plant, animal and human health through a variety of scientific, regulatory and consumer protection programs, as mandated by state law. The Commissioner of Agriculture is one of six statewide elected officials in West Virginia. For more information, visit [www.wvagriculture.org](http://www.wvagriculture.org)*