

FIRST CONFIRMED CASE OF WEST NILE VIRUS IN HORSES

SACRAMENTO - The first 2005 positive equine case of West Nile Virus (WNV) in California was reported in Plumas County. The horse was a 3-year-old Quarter horse mare. The horse is recovering.

WNV is a mosquito-borne virus that was first detected in the United States in 1999 in the New York City area. West Nile Virus may cause a wide range of clinical illness from mild, "flu-like" symptoms, to encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) that may be fatal to both humans and horses. While horses are susceptible to WNV, many horses infected with the disease will not develop any illness and will recover uneventfully. Currently, there is no specific treatment for WNV.

California became the focus for West Nile Virus (WNV) in 2004 with 540 confirmed clinical equine cases. Over 40 percent of clinically affected horses died or were euthanized. In 2004, WNV was detected in all California counties. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has predicted that California will again be the epicenter for WNV in 2005.

Signs of West Nile Virus include, but are not limited to, stumbling, staggering, incoordination, muscle twitching, circling, and inability to stand. Birds serve as the primary reservoir for harboring the disease. Mosquitoes transmit the disease to humans and horses after feeding on infected birds. Once infected, horses do not spread the disease to other humans or horses.

The California Department of Food and Agriculture is urging horse owners to consult their veterinarian to ensure each horse is current on West Nile Virus vaccinations. It is also important to practice mosquito control methods to aid in reducing mosquito-breeding sites.

For more information on West Nile Virus in horses, call the Equine West Nile information line 1-800-268-7378 or email WNVirus@cdfa.ca.gov or visit http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/ahfss/ah/wnv_info.htm.