



Questions & Answers on West Nile Virus and your Pet or Domestic Animal

Operation Mosquito S.T.I.N.G. is a strategy County Executive Andy Spano put in place to address the West Nile encephalitis outbreak. It is designed to track and control mosquitoes at an early stage to prevent illness due to West Nile virus in residents of Westchester County..

What is West Nile encephalitis?

West Nile encephalitis is transmitted through the bite of a mosquito which becomes infected with the virus by feeding on an infected bird. West Nile encephalitis is a viral infection of the brain and can cause serious illness or even be fatal, particularly in people 50 years of age and older.

How is West Nile virus spread?

Through the bite of a mosquito infected with the virus. Infected mosquitoes may be active during daylight as well as evening hours. There is no documented evidence of person-to-person, or animal-to-person transmission of West Nile virus. Birds can spread West Nile virus to other birds.

Can West Nile virus infect or cause illness in dogs and cats?

West Nile virus has been detected in cats and dogs. Although many healthy dogs in the New York City area during the outbreak had blood tests showing they had been infected, the infection rate was low and none of the dogs showed any signs of illness. It is important to remember that dogs and cats cannot transmit West Nile virus to people.

How do dogs, or cats, or other animals become infected with West Nile virus?

The same way humans become infected, by the bite of infectious mosquitoes.

Can horses become infected with West Nile virus?

Yes. Horses have exhibited signs of neurological disease due to West Nile virus and some horses have died of the illness.

My horse is vaccinated against eastern equine encephalitis (EEE), western equine encephalitis (WEE), and Venezuelan equine encephalitis (VEE). Will these vaccines protect my horse against West Nile virus infection?

No. EEE, WEE, and VEE belong to another family of viruses for which there is no cross protection. There is no approved vaccine currently available for West Nile virus.

Should horses, dogs, or cats infected with West Nile virus be destroyed? What is the treatment for animals infected with West Nile virus?

No. There is no reason to destroy a horse, dog or cat just because it has been infected with West Nile virus. Data suggest that most horses recover from the infection and dogs and cats rarely exhibit signs of illness due to infection with West Nile virus. Treatment should be supportive and consistent with standard veterinary practices.

-continued on back-

What precautions should be taken while handling animals that may be infected with West Nile virus?

Evidence indicates that West Nile virus is transmitted through the bite of infected mosquitoes. Veterinarians should take normal infection control precautions when caring for an animal suspected to have West Nile virus or any viral infection causing neurological illness, e.g. wearing gloves. Such precautions are already recommended to protect against contact with saliva of sick animals that may have rabies.

What can I do to protect my horse or pet against West Nile virus?

The mosquito population around your home and property should be reduced using standard precautions to reduce or eliminate all standing water:

- Remove unnecessary water-holding containers, especially old tires, cans, buckets, drums, wheel barrows and bottles.
- Cover trash containers to keep out rain.
- Turn over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use.
- Ensure that your home has tight-fitting screens over windows and doors to keep mosquitoes from entering apartments and homes. Be sure that all screens are in good repair.
- Clean roof gutters and remove standing water from flat roofs.
- Remove standing water from your basement.
- Place a couple of capfuls of household bleach in your basement sump-pump pit if it has standing water.
- Keep drains, culverts and streams on your property clean of weeds and trash so that the water will drain properly.
- Make sure stored boat covers are completely drained. Store small boats upside down.
- Drain the water in birdbaths, plant pots and drip trays twice a week.
- Keep grass cut short and trim shrubs to eliminate hiding places for adult mosquitoes.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools, outdoor saunas and hot tubs. Be sure rainwater does not collect on pool, sauna or hot tub covers. You should disinfect the cover with bleach to kill larvae and eggs.
- Clean vegetation and debris from the edges of ponds.
- Fill in hollow tree stumps and rot holes that hold water with sand or concrete.
- Drill holes in the bottoms of recycling containers that are kept outdoors.

The risk of mosquito bites to animals can be reduced by keeping horses, pets, and other animals inside a sheltered area during the night. Mosquito repellents indicated for each species of animal also can be applied according to direction.

Reporting and testing of ill animals:

Rabies submissions must be coordinated with the local health agency, and procedures for submission are listed on the NYSDOH Wadsworth Center's Rabies Laboratory website: www.wadsworth.org/rabies/.

For West Nile virus testing of encephalitis cases in livestock or domestic animals such as horses, cattle, sheep, goats, swine, etc. call Dr. Susan Trock of Cornell University/NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets (518-457-3502)

For West Nile virus testing of encephalitis cases in small animals such as dogs and cats, please consult Dr. Amy Willsey, NYSDOH Assistant State Public Health Veterinarian (518-474-3186). Cornell University's Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory will offer veterinarians West Nile testing for their client's animals and coordinate additional West Nile testing as requested by New York State Agriculture and Markets. NYSDOH's Wadsworth Center will routinely conduct WNV testing of horse brains that have tested rabies-negative at the Rabies Laboratory.

*Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: CDC answers your questions about WEST NILE ENCEPHALITIS
Visit the CDC website at www.cdc.gov or the New York State Department of Health website at www.health.state.ny.us/ for more information on West Nile virus.*

For more information, call the West Nile Virus Information Line at (914) 813-5609 or Westchester County Department of Health at (914) 813-5000 or visit our website at Westchestergov.com/health

