

Sept 1, 2004

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Jackson County Horse Tests Positive For West Nile Virus

Jackson County Health and Human Services, Oregon Department of Agriculture and the Oregon Department of Human Services announce today that a horse in the Ashland area has tested positive for the West Nile Virus. The horse became ill on 8/20/04 and later had to be euthanized. The horse was not vaccinated against West Nile.

“It is critical that all horses be vaccinated,” says Dr. Tara Timpson of Crater Animal Clinic who took care of the horse with West Nile. Horses need an initial dose and a booster vaccine at least 21 days later. Adequate protection is provided approximately 10 days after the booster. Annual boosters are necessary to maintain protection.

The virus can infect the central nervous system of horses and cause symptoms of encephalitis. Clinical signs of encephalitis in horses include weakness or paralysis of hind limbs, hyper-excitability, ataxia (un-coordination), and convulsions. It is important to note that not all horses with clinical signs of encephalitis have West Nile encephalitis. Call your veterinarian if you witness any of the above symptoms in your horses.

West Nile virus is transmitted through the bite of infected mosquitoes. Horses become infected from mosquitoes that have previously fed on infected birds. Infected birds have been identified in a number of locations throughout Jackson County. “Since the horse had not been out of the Rogue Valley, we know that West Nile is now in local mosquito populations, as well as birds,” said Gary Stevens, Program Manager of Jackson County Environmental Health.

Horses are considered “dead-end” hosts, which means they don’t develop enough virus in the bloodstream to infect mosquitoes. Only birds are known to pass the virus through mosquitoes to other birds, animals, or humans.

Individuals should take precautions against mosquitoes Dr Emilio DeBess, public health veterinarian, in the Oregon Department of Human Services, urges the following tips to help prevent the spread of disease.

Protect Yourself

The hours at dusk and dawn are peak mosquito biting times. Consider avoiding outdoor activities during these times or take extra care to use repellent that contains DEET and follow the label directions. Wear protective clothing during evening and early morning hours.

Make sure that doors and windows have tight-fitting screens. Repair or replace screens that have tears or holes.

Observe and report. If you find a dead bird and are concerned about what to do with it, report it to your local health department or vector control agency.

Control Mosquito Breeding Sites

Help reduce the number of mosquitoes in outdoor areas by draining sources of standing water; for example, leaf-clogged gutters, birdbaths and old tires. In this way, you reduce the number of places mosquitoes can lay their eggs and breed.

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