

WNV (West Nile Virus Encephalomyelitis)

What are the signs of WNV?

Affected horses show a wide range of neurologic signs. They may act odd, become unstable or wobbly, suddenly go blind, have seizures or become recumbent. They may show muscle tremors. They may have a fever (over 101.5). The disease progresses fairly rapidly. Over 30% of affected horses die or are euthanized, and a large percentage of survivors have permanent neurologic problems (wobbliness, incoordination, etc).

How is WNV spread?

WNV is NOT spread from horse to horse. It is caused by a virus, and is spread by mosquitoes.

What puts horses at risk for WNV?

Mosquitoes. Proximity to standing water that provides a breeding ground for mosquitoes. But not being vaccinated is the biggest risk!

Is WNV around here?

Yes. GVEC treated multiple horses with WNV during 2001-2004 after the disease was first discovered in Long Island. We have continued to see cases on a sporadic basis since then, and surveillance of the mosquito population in New York State continues to find mosquitoes that carry the virus.

How is WNV diagnosed?

There are blood tests that can help diagnose acute WNV, but they take several days to process. Diagnosis on horses that die is done on brain tissue. As the signs of WNV can be similar to rabies, public health laws mandate that veterinarians test the brain of any horse that shows profound neurologic signs. Testing is a grim process that involves removing the head after the horse dies.

What about the vaccine?

WNV vaccine IS EXTREMELY effective in preventing disease. All horses should receive annual vaccination.

My horse has never been vaccinated. What should I do?

Even though the mosquito season is waning, there still is a risk of transmission of this serious disease. Schedule an appointment to have the vaccine administered now. Full vaccination will require a booster dose in 3-4 weeks. Once the two dose series is complete, the horse should be revaccinated prior to mosquito season annually.

My horse was vaccinated a few years ago, but not this year. What should I do?

Schedule an appointment to have the vaccine administered now. As long as a booster series was given in the past, you do not need to boost again this year but you should keep up on annual revaccination.

My horse was vaccinated this spring. What should I do since fall has been so warm?

In our climate, vaccination that is administered once a year prior to insect season is considered protective.

Can I get WNV from my horse?

The simple answer is no. However, you CAN get WNV from a mosquito bite. It can cause serious neurologic disease in people. It has occasionally been fatal, and has also left some people with permanent neurologic problems.