



STATE OF NEW YORK  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND MARKETS  
10B AIRLINE DRIVE  
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12235

April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012

Dear New York Horse Owner,

As our mild winter comes to an end, it's time to start planning spring vaccinations, fecal examinations for parasites, and other routine preventative care for your horse. The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets strongly encourages all horse owners to protect their horses and themselves against two serious and potentially fatal viruses spread by mosquitoes – Eastern Equine Encephalomyelitis (EEE) and West Nile Virus (WNV). These diseases primarily threaten people and unvaccinated horses, but can also be spread to other animals such as dogs, deer, llamas, cattle, and ratites (emus). The viruses multiply in certain species of birds and when mosquitoes feed on the infected birds; the virus is carried to other warm-blooded animals when the mosquito is feeding. Mammals such as people and horses are “dead end hosts” for the viruses, meaning that infected people and horses do **not** spread the virus to others either directly or indirectly through mosquitoes.

Since 2009, confirmed cases of EEE in New York's horses have been on the rise. In 2009, there were 7 cases, in 2010 there were 10 cases and last year there were 12 confirmed cases. In 2009, all equine cases were fatal. In both 2010 and 2011, all equine cases but 1 were fatal. Serious after effects from the diseases often cause the horses to be unsafe to be around and unusable if they do survive.

Here are some things that you should do now:

- **Vaccinate!** EEE is almost always combined with Western Equine Encephalitis and Tetanus vaccine. Some combination vaccines also include WNV. Foals, broodmares and horses with unknown vaccination history can all be vaccinated if the label instructions are followed. Horses that are being vaccinated for the first time will require a booster shot 3 weeks later in order to be most effective. If the booster is not given the horse will not be protected in most cases. Don't delay.
- **Learn about encephalitis viruses** – Your veterinarian is the best resource for your farm's specific needs. There are also reputable resources online such as the American Association of Equine Practitioners' (AAEP) website [www.aaep.org](http://www.aaep.org) for specific disease and vaccination information.
- **Get your farm ready for mosquito season** – Take a look at all areas on the farm where your horse(s) have access and ask yourself, “Are these areas where mosquitoes or wild birds gather?” If so, then make these places less inviting for mosquitoes and wild birds. Eliminate standing

water where mosquitoes breed. Fix or put up screens in stalls to keep out mosquitoes or wild birds. Put horses inside the barn during peak mosquito activity hours – typically dawn and dusk.

- **Know the signs of EEE and WNV in horses** – EEE generally affects a horse much more quickly and severely than WNV. The death rate for unvaccinated horses with EEE is much higher compared to WNV. You may see any of the following symptoms in horses affected by EEE or WNV :
  - Fever
  - Stumbling
  - Blindness
  - Muscle twitching around face, neck, muzzle
  - Can't get up, falling over
  - Leaning against stall, fence
  - Depression
  - Change in behavior, appetite
  - Seizures, seizure-like activity
  - Sudden death, found dead
  - Sudden onset of symptoms/illness (few hours – 2 days with EEE, 3-10 days with WNV)

If you see any of these symptoms in your horse, do not move the horse (unless it is in an unsafe location) and call your veterinarian immediately. Experienced horse owners know that horses with neurologic conditions can be very dangerous to be around. If you're seeing these signs in your horse, be extremely cautious. Don't forget that **rabies** is also possible in a horse exhibiting these problems. Minimize your exposure and contact your veterinarian immediately.

- **Protect Yourself!** Don't forget to take the necessary precautions to protect yourself against EEE or WNV. There is no vaccine for people at this time, so you need to take steps to prevent mosquito bites. Wear long sleeved clothing when working outside, especially during the high mosquito activity hours of dawn and dusk. Apply mosquito repellent and speak to your physician if you have any questions. All ages of people are susceptible to these viruses, but young children and older adults are extremely sensitive. Contact your local health department for more information about EEE or WNV in humans. Also, reliable information can be found at these resources:
  - New York State Dept of Health  
[http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/arboviral/fact\\_sheet.htm](http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/arboviral/fact_sheet.htm)
  - CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)  
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/arbor/index.htm>

EEE is easily prevented in horses and there is no legitimate reason for any New York horse to die this year from EEE. Two doses of combination vaccine (if a horse has never been vaccinated) can be purchased for as little as 10-20 dollars. You can protect your horse for a year for less than the cost of 4 gallons of gasoline. Thank you for helping to safeguard New York's equine population. If you have questions please visit our website at: <http://www.agriculture.ny.gov/AI/AIHome.html>

Sincerely,



David C. Smith, DVM  
Director, Division of Animal Industry