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Vaccinate horses for protection against West Nile Virus

Stanislaus County - Stanislaus County health officials are urging horse owners to not wait to vaccinate horses for protection against West Nile Virus. The first case of equine West Nile Virus for 2007 has already been reported in California and it's an important reminder to horse owners to be sure their animals are vaccinated. Last year, 3 horses in Stanislaus County were known to have contracted the disease and one of them died. A total of 58 horses were confirmed to have WNV in the state and twenty-four of those horses died. In a majority of those cases, the horses were either not vaccinated or vaccinated improperly.

“While vaccination does not prevent infection 100% of the time, it does prevent death or disability in the majority of equines infected with the virus,” said Dr. Dan Rolfe, a veterinarian with the California Department of Food and Agriculture “Horse owners are urged to contact their private veterinarians and schedule a 'spring check-up' for WNV vaccination as soon as possible.”

Signs of West Nile virus in horses include stumbling, staggering, wobbling, weakness, muscle twitching and inability to stand. Horses contract the disease from carrier mosquitoes and are not contagious to other horses or people. Horses (and other equine) are not a risk for human infection, but are indicators of virus prevalence. Unfortunately, having a valued pet or working partner die due to a preventable disease is a sad occurrence.

In March, the Turlock and Eastside Mosquito Abatement Districts began their annual spraying campaigns to control the local mosquito population. So far this year, there have been no confirmed cases of WNV in Stanislaus County.

The California Department of Health Services is encouraging everyone to become “West Nile watchers” and report dead birds to help identify hotspots of WNV activity. To report dead birds call 1-877-WNV-BIRD. For more information on WNV visit www.StanEmergency.com, and find additional information including current case counts of WNV for the entire state at www.westnile.ca.gov.

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