

Release



QUESTION: Do I need to vaccinate if West Nile virus wasn't in my area last year?

ANSWER: Absolutely. Even if West Nile virus (WNV) hasn't been diagnosed in horses in your area recently, they should still be vaccinated because WNV is considered to be endemic to all areas of North America.¹ In fact, the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) recommends that all horses in North America be immunized against WNV.² Unfortunately, the threat of WNV infection is brought home even more by continuing and widespread reports of human infections.³

Infected birds carry WNV, then the disease is further transmitted to humans or horses by mosquitoes.⁴ WNV continues to be a concern for human and equine populations because migrating birds⁴ and overwintering mosquitoes⁵ continue to carry the disease. Additionally, risk of exposure may increase or decrease from year to year because of changes in mosquito population.¹

WNV is a costly and deadly disease that attacks the central nervous system.⁶ Infected horses may develop signs, including incoordination and stumbling,⁷ depression, excitability, muscle trembling and fever.⁸ One in three horses showing clinical signs of WNV will die.⁸

While many horses will survive WNV, about 40 percent may still exhibit lingering problems, such as gait and behavioral abnormalities as long as six months after being diagnosed.¹ Additionally, since there is no cure for this disease, once a horse develops clinical signs of WNV, only supportive care can be given.⁸

Horse owners should choose a vaccine that will start working fast⁹ and will help guard against WNV for the duration of the mosquito season, like RECOMBITEK® Equine WNV vaccine from Merial.¹⁰ RECOMBITEK is proven to protect horses fast — just 14 days after the initial two-dose vaccination series — and is safe for foals as young as 2-4 months or older.¹¹

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¹West Nile virus vaccination guidelines. American Association of Equine Practitioners. Available at: http://www.aaep.org/pdfs/AAEP_WNV_Guidelines_2005.pdf. Accessed January 14, 2009.

²Core vaccination guidelines. American Association of Equine Practitioners. Available at: http://www.aaep.org/page_editor_page_preview.php?print_friendly=true&page_name=core_vaccinations. Accessed March 5, 2009.

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⁴Questions & answers about West Nile virus. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Available at: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/lpa/pubs/fsheet_faq_notice/faq_ahwnv.html. Accessed January 14, 2009.

⁵Holland SD. West Nile virus becomes established. South Dakota Animal Industry Board. Available at: <http://www.state.sd.us/aib/Pamphlets/2008.5.12%20WNV%20Pamphlet-readable%20version.pdf>. Accessed January 17, 2009.

⁶Epp T, Waldner C, West K, Townsend H. Factors associated with West Nile virus disease fatalities in horses. *Canadian Veterinary Journal* 2007;48:1137-1145.

⁷Ostlund EN, et al. Equine West Nile encephalitis, United States. *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 2001;7(4):665-669.

⁸*Merck Veterinary Manual*. Ninth edition. 2005:1077-1081.

⁹Siger L et al. Assessment of the efficacy of a single dose of recombinant vaccine against West Nile virus in response to natural challenge with West Nile virus-infected mosquitoes in horses. *AJVR* 2004;65(11):1459-1462.

¹⁰Minke JM et al. Recombinant canarypox virus vaccine carrying the prM/E genes of West Nile virus protects horses against a West Nile virus-mosquito challenge. *Archives of Virology* 2004(Suppl.);18:221-230.

¹¹Data on file at Merial.