



West Nile Virus and Eastern Equine Encephalitis

IN HORSES

Arboviruses

Arboviruses are viruses that are transmitted by arthropods such as mosquitoes and ticks. West Nile virus and Eastern equine encephalitis are types of arboviruses commonly found in Michigan, and cases are typically seen between July and October, because the virus thrives in warm environments.



What is Eastern Equine Encephalitis?

Eastern equine encephalitis, also known as “sleeping sickness,” is a potentially fatal disease caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system. Horses, people, birds, and a variety of small mammals can contract this disease from a mosquito bite. EEE is not spread from horse to horse or from horse to humans.

What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile virus (WNV) is a mosquito-borne virus that causes encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord). Infected horses cannot transmit the disease to other horses.

Signs of EEE

- Weakness
- Lack of coordination or inability to rise
- Inability to swallow
- Head pressing
- Circling
- Convulsions or seizures
- Paddling motion of the limbs when recumbent
- Lack of appetite
- Blindness
- Excitability or depression
- Abnormal sensitivity to light and sound

Signs of WNV

Most horses do not show signs. However, if they do, they may include:

- Low grade fever
- Lack of appetite
- Fine tremors and fasciculations of the face and neck muscles
- Convulsions
- Head tilt, droopy lip, muzzle deviation
- Weakness or in-coordination of one or all limbs, inability to rise
- Colic

Prevention

Vaccines are available for WNV and EEE in horses and have been shown to be safe and provide protection in horses. Work with your veterinarian to get the appropriate vaccines for your horses.

You can also work to prevent spread by controlling mosquitoes:

- Use insect repellents frequently
- Keep horses in at night and under fans when possible
- Eliminate or minimize standing water
- Remove items in which standing water can collect, such as old tires

West Nile virus and EEE are reportable animal diseases. If you suspect an animal has WNV or EEE, contact your veterinarian and report the case to Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development at 800-292-3939. These diseases are tracked for monitoring purposes and MDARD does not quarantine the affected premises. Horse owners are advised to work with their local veterinarian.

