AgNews

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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Delaware DEPARTMENT of AGRICULTURE
Serving Agriculture and Protecting Consumers

**To: Newsroom Directors and Assignment Editors**

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## State Veterinarian reminds horse owners to be sure equine vaccinations are up to date

Due to the recent diagnosis of Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) in a horse in Chesapeake, Virginia, Delaware State Veterinarian Heather Hirst is reminding horse owners to be sure that their equines' vaccinations are up to date. Both horses and humans can contract EEE if they are bitten by a mosquito carrying the virus, although Delaware has not had a confirmed **human** case of EEE since 1979.

The last reported **equine** case of EEE in Delaware was in 2001; however, horse owners are reminded to vaccinate their horses because of the serious nature of this disease. The disease is potentially fatal in horses, with the most severe cases occurring in unvaccinated animals. In prior outbreaks in the US, up to 75 - 90 % of EEE cases in horses were fatal. The EEE virus **cannot** be transmitted from horses to humans, or from human to human. The virus is normally maintained in a cycle between mosquitoes and birds. Occasionally, the EEE virus is transmitted from mosquitoes to mammals, with illness and sometimes death occurring in equines and humans. Mosquito activity peaks at dusk and dawn.

A statewide network in Delaware operated by Mosquito Control monitors for both EEE and West Nile Virus (WNV), the primary mosquito-borne human health threats in Delaware. Last year between June and October 2008, The Delaware Division of Public Health reported that three sentinel chickens tested positive for antibodies to EEE. Sentinel chickens are strategically placed throughout the 3 counties to detect the presence of viruses carried by mosquitoes. A positive antibody result indicates that the chickens were bitten by mosquitoes carrying the virus. Poultry do not develop disease following the mosquito bite.

Dr. Hirst urges horse owners to contact their veterinarian immediately if they suspect their horse may be showing clinical signs of encephalitis (neurological signs). Clinical signs of EEE in horses include fever (102.5-104.5°F), anorexia, head pressing, depression or personality change, wobbling or staggering, weakness, blindness, convulsions, muscle spasms in the head and neck, and hind-limb weakness. These clinical signs are also consistent with WNV infection, for which an equine vaccine is also available. Both EEE and WNV vaccines are available through your equine veterinarian.

For human health questions about EEE or West Nile virus, call the Delaware Division of Public Health at 888-295-5156 or 302-744-4541. Information is also available on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: http://www.cdc.gov/az/e.html .

For animal-related questions about EEE or West Nile, call the Delaware Department of Agriculture at 800-282-8685 (Delaware only) or 302-698-4500, and ask for the Poultry and Animal Health section. Information is also available on the American Association of Equine Practitioners website: http://www.aaep.org/

For questions about the state's Mosquito Control program or mosquito biology, call DNREC at 302-739-9917.

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