



DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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To: Newsroom Directors and Assignment Editors

For Immediate Release:
September 15, 2011

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Sussex county horse shows clinical signs of West Nile Virus

Dr. Heather Hirst, State Veterinarian, announced today that her office received notice of a horse in Sussex County with neurological (nervous system) signs which are consistent with West Nile Virus (WNV) infection. Test results were not conclusive, but showed some evidence that the horse may have recently been exposed to WNV. The horse is improving under veterinary care and is expected to survive. According to Deputy State Veterinarian, Dr. Regina Jensen, this is the first report of a possible West Nile Virus infection in a horse in Delaware since 2003.

West Nile Virus is normally maintained in a cycle between mosquitoes and birds. Occasionally, humans, horses and other animals can contract West Nile Virus (WNV) if they are bitten by a mosquito carrying the virus. However, the virus cannot be transmitted from horses to humans or from human to human.

Most horses that contract WNV are asymptomatic, but clinical cases do occur. Dr. Hirst urges horse owners to contact their veterinarian immediately if they suspect their horse may be showing clinical signs. Clinical signs of WNV may include loss of appetite, aimless wandering or circling, depression or personality change, wobbling or staggering, weakness or paralysis of one or more limbs, convulsions, and muscle spasms in the head and neck. Fever may or may not be present.

The recent rash of wet weather due to hurricane Irene and tropical storm Lee has produced ideal conditions for a dramatic increase in the mosquito population in Delaware. Horse owners are urged to assist with prevention efforts by making sure their horses are vaccinated against West Nile virus. Vaccines are available through your equine veterinarian. Owners should also keep horses inside during peak mosquito times, i.e., dawn and dusk, and use topical insect repellents labeled for use on horses during mosquito season.

DNREC's Mosquito Control urges citizens to practice good water sanitation by draining or removing water-collecting items around their properties to help reduce mosquito-breeding habitats. Delaware's Division of Public Health (DPH) also urges the public to assist with prevention efforts. Residents are advised to take common-sense precautions against insect bites. This includes wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants outdoors, applying insect repellent containing 30 percent or less DEET for adults and 10 percent or less DEET for children, and avoiding mosquito-infested areas or times of peak mosquito activity around dusk, dawn or throughout the evening.

- For human health questions about West Nile virus, call the Delaware Division of Public Health at 888-295-5156 or 302-744-1033.
- For animal-related questions about 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.
- For questions about the state's Mosquito Control program or mosquito biology, call DNREC at 302-739-9917.

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