

Patricia D. Hastings

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Subject: GLOUCESTER COUNTY HORSE FIRST TO BE DIAGNOSED WITH WEST NILE VIRUS IN 2004

Press Release by New Jersey Department of Agriculture. For immediate release, August 17, 2004.
Contact: **Lynne Richmond**; (609)292-8896; lynne.richmond@ag.state.nj.us.

(TRENTON) – The illness of a 7-year-old pregnant mare in Gloucester County has been attributed to infection with the West Nile virus – the first diagnosis of West Nile virus in a horse in New Jersey this year, Agriculture Secretary Charles M. Kuperus announced today.

The horse's owner reported that the horse became ill on August 10th. A veterinarian took a blood sample, which was submitted to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture's animal health laboratory. The results were positive for West Nile virus.

West Nile virus is a viral disease that affects horses' neurological systems. Horses contract the virus when infected mosquitoes bite them. The disease cannot be spread from horse to horse or from an infected horse to humans or domestic pets.

In light of last week's announcement of the first horse in the state this year infected with Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE), another mosquito-borne infection, Secretary Kuperus cited the importance of owners vaccinating their animals.

"The most effective preventive treatment for West Nile Virus for horses is vaccination," said Secretary Kuperus. "Since 2001, there has been a vaccine available for West Nile Virus. We strongly recommend that horse owners have their animals vaccinated against this potentially deadly disease."

Horse owners should contact their veterinarians for more information on vaccinations. The Gloucester County horse diagnosed with West Nile virus had not been vaccinated.

Last year, 150 horses in New Jersey were diagnosed with West Nile virus infection. Of those, 51 were either euthanized or died.

Nationwide, 24 other states have reported West Nile virus in 210 horses in 2004.

For more information about West Nile virus in horses, visit the New Jersey Department of Agriculture web site at www.state.nj.us/agriculture/westnile.htm.

Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) is a rare but serious disease that causes inflammation of the brain tissue and has a significantly higher risk of death than West Nile infection.

An effective equine vaccine for EEE has been available for many years. Horse owners should contact their veterinarians now if their horses are not already up-to-date on their vaccinations against both EEE and West Nile virus. It is important to note that the vaccine for West Nile virus does not protect horses against EEE, or vice versa.

West Nile virus and EEE, like other viral diseases affecting horses' neurological systems, must be reported to the state veterinarian at 609-292-3965 within 48 hours.

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