



WEST NILE VIRUS

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a viral disease that causes encephalitis, an infection of the brain and spinal cord. WNV was first identified in the western hemisphere in 1999, in birds in the Bronx zoo.

WNV causes disease and mortality in humans, wildlife (particularly birds) and domestic animals (particularly horses). Birds are the reservoir of disease and infected mosquitoes are the vector (primary mode of transmission). Neither infected humans nor horses are considered carriers of the disease.

While WNV's largest impact has been in the eastern US, it is important to get prepared for its westward spread. Prevention has two parts: 1) mosquito control, and 2) vaccination. Mosquito control, including removal of standing water and use of repellants on your animals, minimizes exposure to adult mosquitoes. Vaccination of your horses, to provide a protective immune response, is available as well. The WNV vaccine, produced by Fort Dodge Laboratories, Inc., is a killed vaccine. It is restricted to use by a veterinarian in those states where use of the product has been approved by the state's regulatory authorities. Extensive efficacy and safety data are not available, but it is generally considered safe, with only a small percentage of horses reported to have serious side effects.

Our equine practitioners will be reviewing the current status and vaccine use information for WNV in February 2003, after which time Pilchuck expects to post its vaccine protocol recommendations for horses in our area.

For an excellent summary of the disease see The Ohio State University Extension, Fact Sheet, West Nile Virus Series at ohioline.osu.edu/wnv-fact/index.html.