



NEWS RELEASE

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FIRST BUTTE COUNTY HORSE POSITIVE FOR WEST NILE VIRUS IN 2005

Butte County Public Health Department officials received confirmation on Monday, August 1, 2005, from the California Department of Health Services that an Oroville horse tested positive for West Nile Virus (WNV). The horse became symptomatic on July 26, 2005, and is alive. This is the first WNV positive horse case in Butte County for 2005.

“In 2004, Butte County had 18 horses confirmed for West Nile infection. Over 80% came down with the infection in August and September 2004. Based on last year’s experience, horses will be at greatest risk for WNV during the next several months. Horse owners of unvaccinated or partially vaccinated horses are urged to contact their veterinarian,” states Dr. Mark Lundberg, Butte County Health Officer. “West Nile infection in horses is preventable with the WNV vaccine.”

To date in Butte County, one human case of West Nile infection has been confirmed and seven (7) dead birds have tested positive WNV.

As of July 29, 2005, California Department of Health Services reports the following WNV positive case activity for California: Humans – 56, horses – 48, dead birds – 828, mosquito pools – 487 and sentinel chickens – 5.

In horses, West Nile WNV is a mosquito-borne disease, and causes inflammation or swelling of the brain and/or spinal chord, much like encephalitic viruses such as Eastern,

Western and Venezuelan equine encephalomyelitis. While only 1 percent of humans infected with WNV become seriously ill or die, the disease is fatal in 40 to 50 percent of all horses that contract it. Wild birds, especially the corvids (e.g., crows, ravens, jays, magpies) are susceptible to the disease and are considered to be hosts of WNV. These birds develop a high level of virus in their blood which then can be spread by mosquitoes to humans, horses or other animals. Mosquito, bird, horse and human surveillance has been instrumental in detecting the presence of WNV across California and the U.S.

Symptoms of West Nile Virus infection in horses may mimic other neurologic diseases such as rabies. Horse owners can further protect their horses by vaccinating them against rabies on an annual basis. Clinical signs in horses may include weakness, lack of coordination, stumbling, circling, falling, muscle tremors, loss of appetite, lethargy, fever, seizures, partial paralysis and coma. If any of these signs are observed in a horse, call a veterinarian immediately. Diagnosis is based on neurologic examination and serologic testing by a veterinarian. There is no specific treatment for WNV infection in horses, though supportive and symptomatic treatment assists in the recovery of ill horses with 50% to 60% of horses with WNV infection surviving.

Control measures for decreasing the risk of WNV infection should include decreasing the mosquito breeding sites in sources of stagnant water around the barn, stable and pasture, and frequently cleaning watering troughs. It's also important to reduce exposure to adult mosquitoes by using fly sheets for horses and the topical application of an appropriate mosquito repellent for horses containing a synthetic pyrethroid compound when appropriate.

Equine WNV vaccines made by Fort Dodge and Merial are federally approved, safe and effective. The UC Davis Center for Equine Health recommends vaccinating all healthy horses initially with a two (2) dose series, three to four weeks apart, before mosquito season starts and then follow-up with a booster every six months. Pregnant mares should receive WNV vaccine

at 10 months of gestation to improve the protective quality of the colostrum. Foals should be vaccinated at two months, three month and six months of age with the Merial's RECOMBITEK vaccine. Horses vaccinated with the two dose series and given adequate time to develop antibodies are completely protected from WNV. A number of horses vaccinated with only a single dose of the vaccine have not been protected and have become ill when exposed to the disease. There is no cross protection with the Eastern, Western or Venezuelan equine encephalomyelitis vaccines. The cost of the WNV vaccine is about \$25 to \$30 per dose. Call your veterinarian for more information regarding WNV vaccine for horses.

For further information call:

- Butte County Public Health Department: 891-2732 (Chico)
538-7553 (Oroville)
1-800-399-2941 (English, Spanish, Hmong, Toll Free)
- Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control: 533-6038
- Durham Mosquito Abatement district: 345-2875
- Oroville Abatement District: 534-8383

Informative websites on WNV include the following:

- Butte County Public Health Department: www.buttecountypublichealth.org
- California Department of Health Services: <http://westnile.ca.gov>
- Centers for Disease Control: www.cdc/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm
- California Department of Food and Agriculture: www.cdffa.ca.gov
- University of California, Davis: www.vetmet.ucdavis.edu