

Spring Health Guide for Horse Owners

For Immediate Release

Contact: Denise Derrer, Public Information Director, 317/544-2414

INDIANAPOLIS(15 May 2013)—Warm weather has finally arrived, and the Indiana State Board of Animal Health (BOAH) encourages horse owners to update their animals' vaccinations now for the best protection against disease-carrying mosquitoes.

Vaccinations against Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) or "sleeping sickness" and West Nile virus (WNV) are available to protect horses, mules and donkeys. However, both vaccines must initially be administered in two doses 3-4 weeks apart, to become effective. Equids may not achieve disease-resistance until after vaccination because full protection doesn't develop until four to six weeks following the second dose. Annual booster shots are needed to maintain protection.

EEE causes swelling of the brain, staggering, convulsions and fever in horses. EEE can even be transmitted to humans by mosquitoes that have fed on diseased birds; however, horses do not transmit the disease to humans.

WNV is a neurologic disease that was unheard of in the United States until 1999. Since then, WNV has spread throughout the country. Like other encephalitis, WNV causes swelling of the brain, which can cause staggering, incoordination, weakness of limbs, ataxia, partial paralysis or death. WNV is transmitted by mosquitoes that have fed on infected birds, but is not known to be transmitted from man-to-horse or horse-to-man.

Dr. Sandra Norman, BOAH companion animal and equine veterinarian, suggests owners take additional prevention steps by reducing mosquito populations by draining standing water from birdbaths, troughs and other containers. Owners may want to stable their animals overnight to provide added protection. Insect repellents should be used judiciously, and always according to label directions.

Horse owners should also vaccinate now for equine influenza, tetanus and rabies. Many combination vaccinations are available. Horse owners should contact their local equine practitioner to schedule immunizations and ask about options.

Dr. Norman also suggests traveling horses have a recent equine infectious anemia (or Coggins) test, even though it is not required for horses moving within Indiana. Coggins is required in many other states and the time the test is considered current varies from state to state. When traveling, owners should have a certificate of veterinary inspection written within the previous 30 days and check with their destination's office to receive up-to-date rules and regulations for entering.

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Denise Derrer

Public Information Director

Indiana State Board of Animal Health

Discovery Hall, Ste. 100

1202 E. 38th Street

Indianapolis, IN 46205-2898

Phone: 317-544-2414

www.boah.in.gov