

West Nile Virus FAQs



1. Can pets/livestock get WNV?

Horses can become infected with WNV if bitten by mosquitoes that carry the virus. There is a published report of West Nile virus isolated from a dog in southern Africa (Botswana) in 1982. West Nile virus has been isolated from several dead cats in 1999 and 2000. A survey of the blood of dogs and cats in the epidemic area showed a low infection rate.

2. What signs of infection should I look for in domestic animals?

West Nile virus and other mosquito-borne viruses can cause encephalitis in domestic animals. Sick animals may have a fever, weakness, poor muscle coordination, muscle spasms and signs of a neurological disease, such as change in temperament or seizures.

3. What should I do if I suspect my pet has WNV?

If your animal is sick, contact your veterinarian. The veterinarian will evaluate your animal, provide treatment and forward samples for laboratory testing to rule out other possible diseases. The Illinois Department of Agriculture can help veterinarians determine if WNV is the cause once the illness is reported.

4. Can you get WNV directly from birds, game, or domestic animals?

The risk to humans and domestic animals is from the bite of WNV-infected mosquitoes. Although there is no evidence of human infection from handling infected live or dead animals, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that anyone handling sick or dead animals avoid bare-handed contact. Hunters should use gloves when cleaning game animals and persons disposing of dead birds should use a shovel, gloves or double plastic bags to place carcasses in a garbage can. After disposing of the carcass, thoroughly wash your hands with soap and warm water. Veterinarians should use normal veterinary infection control precautions when caring for a horse suspected to have this or any other infection.



West Nile Virus FAQs Continued



5. Is there a vaccine for pets and livestock for WNV?

A vaccine is available to protect horses from WNV infection; vaccines for other domestic animals are not available currently.

6. How is WNV Infection in domestic animals treated?

As in people, there are no specific treatments for WNV infection in domestic animals. Treatment is primarily supportive to lessen the severity of the symptoms.

7. What should I do if I suspect my pet has WNV?

If your animal is sick, contact your veterinarian. The veterinarian will evaluate your animal, provide treatment and forward samples for laboratory testing to rule out other possible diseases. The Illinois Department of Agriculture can help veterinarians determine if WNV is the cause once the illness is reported.

8. How can I protect pets and livestock from WNV?

You can reduce the risk of WNV infection in animals by minimizing their exposure to infected mosquitoes.

9. Where can I get more information on WNV?

Call your local health department or the Illinois Department of Public Health at the telephone numbers listed below.

- Vector Control and Arbovirus Surveillance Program
- Division of Environmental Health
- For technical questions regarding mosquitoes and mosquito control measures, call 217-782-5830 or visit www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/ehhome.htm
- Division of Infectious Diseases
- Office of Health Protection

For information about WNV infections in people, call 217-782-2016 or visit www.idph.state.il.us/health/infect/reportdis/encephalitis.htm

