

Panhandle

Public Health District

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September 22, 2025

For immediate release

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Panhandle Horse Tests Positive for West Nile Virus

The Nebraska Department of Agriculture has received a report of a horse in the Panhandle that has contracted West Nile virus. Horses can become infected with the virus after being bitten by an infected mosquito; however, they cannot transmit West Nile virus to other horses or people after they contract the disease. While many horses can be exposed to the disease and not show symptoms, about 35% will become ill and will have to be potentially euthanized.

Horses that may be infected with West Nile virus may exhibit one or more symptoms that include:

- Weakness (hind end, front or back legs), incoordination
- Muscle twitching
- Altered mental state
- Hypersensitivity to touch or sound
- Cataplexy or narcolepsy
- Seizures
- Blindness
- Cranial nerve deficits (tongue weakness, difficulty swallowing)
- Fever

There are four West Nile virus vaccines that are licensed through the United States Department of Agriculture to use on horses. If you have not vaccinated your horse or are unsure if your horse has been vaccinated, please contact your local veterinarian. Vaccines have been shown to be the best strategy to help prevent West Nile virus infection in horses.

So far this year, 124 mosquito surveillance samples have tested positive across the state, 50 of them in the Panhandle. In Scotts Bluff County, one sample also tested positive for St. Louis Encephalitis, another mosquito-borne disease. Statewide, 31 human cases of West Nile virus have been reported, including cases identified through blood donations. Of those, 13 cases were from the Panhandle.

Although surveillance efforts are taking place, Panhandle residents are urged to continue protecting themselves by following these prevention tips until the first freeze takes place:

- Applying mosquito repellent containing DEET, picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus;
- Wearing long-sleeved shirt, pants and socks;



- Avoiding going out at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active;
- Eliminating standing water to reduce mosquito breeding sites
- Keep window screens in good repair, and;
- Use larvicides that contain *Bacillus thuringiensis* in standing water that is not easily drainable.

To request further information on West Nile virus, please visit www.pphd.ne.gov or call 308-487-3600 x108 or toll free 866-701-7173. Panhandle Public Health District is working together to improve the health, safety and quality of life for all who live, learn, work and play in the Panhandle. Our vision is that we are a healthier and safer Panhandle Community.