

Panhandle

Public Health District

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For immediate release

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Panhandle Horse Tests Positive for West Nile Virus

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services has received a report of a horse in the Panhandle that tested positive for West Nile virus. Horses can become infected after being bitten by an infected mosquito but cannot transmit the virus to other horses or people. While some infected horses may not show symptoms, approximately 35% of those that become ill may develop severe disease and may need to be euthanized.

Horses 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, 27 mosquito surveillance samples have tested positive for West Nile virus across Nebraska, including five in the Panhandle. This is the first reported case of West Nile virus in a horse in the Panhandle in 2026. There have been no reported human cases in Nebraska so far.

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 308-765-1939. 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.