



# Washington State Department of Agriculture

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## **West Nile virus confirmed in Franklin County horse; first case of the year**

**OLYMPIA** – The Washington State Department of Agriculture is reporting that an unvaccinated horse in Mesa, Franklin County is the first in our state to contract West Nile virus (WNV) this year. The horse is showing progressive neurological signs, including rear end paralysis. It was not immediately known if the horse had traveled outside of the state recently.

The Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory in Pullman reported the positive test results to the State Veterinarian's Office today. On Monday, the state Department of Health reported a Walla Walla County man as the first Washington resident in 2014 known to have been infected with West Nile virus in our state.

West Nile virus is spread by mosquitoes that have fed on infected birds. The disease sickens people, horses, birds and other animals, but it does not spread from horses to people or other animals.

WNV is fatal to horses in about a third of the cases in which clinical signs are apparent, although most horses do not become ill and show no symptoms. Horses that do become ill can appear to be displaying loss of coordination, loss of appetite, confusion, fever, stiffness, and muscle weakness, particularly in their hindquarters.

Acting State Veterinarian Dr. Paul Kohrs noted Washington had two confirmed cases of horses with West Nile virus last year, including a horse in Pasco and one in Outlook in Yakima County. Oregon had six equine cases and Idaho recorded 10 cases last year.

Kohrs recommends spring as the best time to vaccinate horses against West Nile virus or obtain booster shots. Besides vaccination, horse owners can take steps to limit horse exposure to mosquitoes. For example, reduce or eliminate sources of stagnant or standing water, stable horses during peak mosquito periods (dawn and dusk), use equine-approved mosquito repellants, place fans inside barns or stalls to maintain air movement, and avoid using incandescent bulbs inside stables at night.

Veterinarians who learn of potential West Nile Virus cases in horses or other animals should contact the State Veterinarian's Office at (360) 902-1881.

Visit the websites of the state [Department of Agriculture](#), [Department of Health](#), or the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) for more information.

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