

# MDA Equine Health Alert Updates

## West Nile Virus & Rhinopneumonitis

with Dr. Roger Olson,  
Maryland State Veterinarian

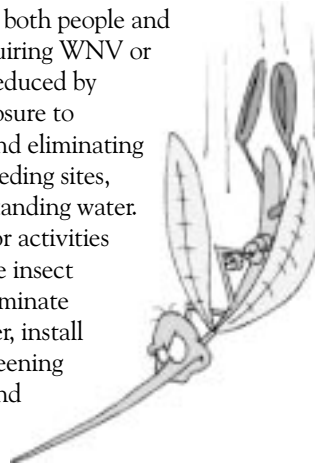
### West Nile

It is time to start thinking about West Nile virus (WNV) again. Both horses and humans infected with WNV were detected for the first time last year in Maryland. Seven horses, six in Baltimore County and one in Anne Arundel County, had confirmed WNV infections, of which six recovered and one was euthanized. Six people were infected as well, with two fatalities. Both the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the Department of Agriculture are recommending that Maryland equine enthusiasts protect both themselves and their horses from infection with WNV.

WNV is spread by mosquitoes from infected birds to humans, horses and other animals. Clinical signs in horses include listlessness, trembling, head shaking, lower lip or tongue paralysis, lack of coordination or staggering, weakness of the hind legs, paralysis, or sudden death. A veterinarian should be contacted immediately if any of these symptoms are observed. An equine vaccine for WNV is currently available; the vaccine is initially given twice, 3 to 6 weeks apart. An annual booster is recommended. If horses have not yet received any WNV immunizations, it is recommended that the horse begin the vaccination series now before mosquito season is upon us.

Both eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) and rabies can cause clinical signs in horses that are similar to WNV. EEE is also transmitted by mosquitoes and was detected in 2001 in mosquitoes from Worcester and Wicomico counties. An excellent vaccine is available for EEE, but it must be boosted at least annually and preferably twice a year. It is also recommended that horses receive an annual rabies vaccination. In Maryland, only a licensed veterinarian may administer rabies vaccine. Consult your local veterinarian for a vaccination schedule to protect horses against EEE, WNV, and rabies.

The risk to both people and horses of acquiring WNV or EEE can be reduced by avoiding exposure to mosquitoes and eliminating mosquito-breeding sites, particularly standing water. Avoid outdoor activities after dark, use insect repellents, eliminate standing water, install fine mesh screening in windows and doors of homes and stables, and avoid marshes and wetlands. People are also advised to wear light colored clothing, long sleeved shirts, and long pants.



General information on WNV virus is available from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene at [www.edcp.org/htmwest\\_nile.html](http://www.edcp.org/htmwest_nile.html) and from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile).

—R.O.

### Rhinopneumonitis

As e-mails and website bulletin boards ignite a firestorm of concern over a "Rhino" strain epidemic, the MDA has not, as of press time, issued any sort of alerts or travel restrictions. According to Dr. Olson, Maryland has seen only three unconfirmed cases in late winter. All three could be traced back to a single source, and all three horses have been euthanized. The source of the infection was traced to a horse recently purchased out of state. The outbreak was quickly contained so as to not pose a threat, according to Dr. Olson. If and when MDA posts any alerts, we will publish them in *The Equiery* and post them on [www.eququery.com](http://www.eququery.com).

If you have any other questions or concerns, please contact Dr. DuVernoy at 410-767-6703 or Dr. Roger Olson at 410-841-5810. ♦