

Owners Urged to Vaccinate Against Mosquito-borne Diseases

Centers for Disease Control reports West Nile virus cases are four times higher than last year.

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Florida Agriculture and Consumer Services Commissioner Charles H. Bronson is urging horse owners to vaccinate their animals against the mosquito-borne diseases Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) and West Nile Virus in the wake of Centers for Disease Control warnings about a potential West Nile epidemic.

According to a news release from Bronson's office, the Centers for Disease Control says the number of human West Nile Virus (WNV) cases in the United States is nearly four times higher than what it was this time last year. The virus, carried by mosquitoes, can cause flu-like symptoms in people and in horses and can be fatal in the equine population. Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) is also often fatal in horses.

Horse owners are urged to check with their veterinarians to make sure their animals have received current vaccinations and booster shots against WNV, EEE and Western Equine Encephalitis (WEE), and that these shots are kept up to date. (WEE is also a mosquito-borne disease.)

The number of horses that have become infected with mosquito-borne disease has declined over the last few years as the result of good vaccination practices, but the current surge in human cases of WNV has state veterinarians concerned. State veterinarians in Georgia, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Florida have all released public warnings about the threats of mosquito-borne diseases in horses.

Mosquito populations are high this time of year, so horse owners should take extra precautions to reduce mosquito-breeding habitats—mainly standing water.

According to the USDA's National Animal Health Surveillance System, as of July 24, Florida has seen 9 cases of EEE during 2007; Virginia and Arizona have reported one case each this year. States that have reported WNV in horses this year are Arizona, California, Idaho, Kansas, Mississippi, North Dakota, New Mexico, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia. To date, no states have reported cases of WEE.