



Anthrax and West Nile Virus in Saskatchewan



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Summer in Saskatchewan brings a few unwanted visitors to the agricultural community. The first, anthrax, is present around the world and can survive in soil for decades. West Nile Virus, however, is a more recent introduction, with human and equine cases first occurring in North America in 1999.

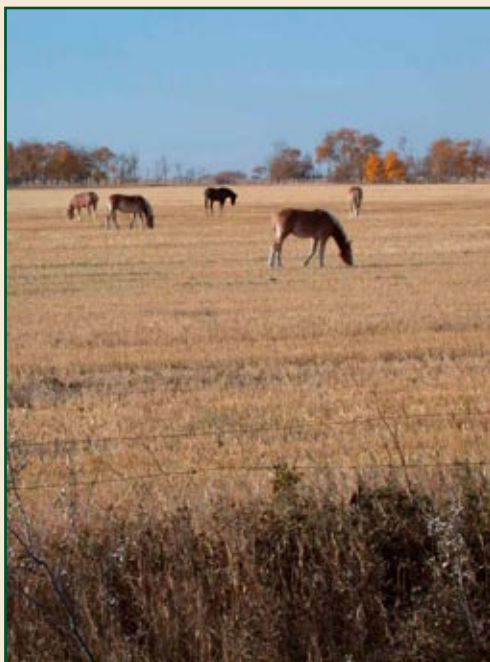
Anthrax is caused by a type of bacteria. While anthrax bacteria are always present in some soils, the disease occurs in livestock when it is able to get from the soil into the digestive tract. This most commonly occurs when animals graze on contaminated forage.

In 2006, Saskatchewan experienced an unprecedented outbreak of anthrax in livestock. By the end of the summer, approximately 800 animals on over 150 farms had died. We don't know why the outbreak was so severe, although anything that causes the bacteria to come to the surface of the soil, such as flooding or excavation, is believed to be a factor.

Anyone concerned about anthrax may wish to discuss vaccination with their local veterinarian. Anthrax is a federally reportable disease. Anyone who suspects that one of their animals may have anthrax, or may have died of anthrax, should contact either their local

veterinarian or their local Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) district office.

The virus which causes West Nile Virus (WNV) infection in horses is carried by mosquitoes which have fed on infected birds. There is no known risk of spreading this disease to other horses or to people. Symptoms can include fever, loss of appetite, stumbling, and coma. A veterinarian should be consulted to diagnose and treat WNV infection, and to ensure that other possible causes of neurological disease are ruled out, particularly rabies.



Horses are susceptible to West Nile Virus.

Horse owners should talk to their veterinarians every spring about WNV, and discuss whether a vaccination program is appropriate. To be most effective, vaccination must be done well before horses are exposed to infected mosquitoes to ensure a proper immune response. However, even at this time of the year, veterinarians can provide advice on control of local mosquito populations, available insect repellants and how to determine whether a horse has become infected with this virus.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Local CFIA offices can be found in the Government of Canada blue pages of local telephone directories, or by phoning the CFIA western area office at 403-292-4301.
- Further information on WNV is available at www.health.gov.sk.ca/west-nile-virus.

PERSONAL PROTECTION IS THE KEY TO PREVENTING WEST NILE

by *Karen Hill*
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In 2007, Saskatchewan saw recurrence in human cases of West Nile Virus (WNV) that surpassed the previous record year of 2002. After several years of declining numbers, there were 1,456 human cases of WNV including 113 cases of the more severe neurological syndrome last year. This sudden increase reminds us that WNV is in the province to stay, and that the only way to prevent the illness is to take personal protective measures.



City of Regina workers applying larvicide to standing water near the city.

Whether you're in your yard or in the field, the Ministry of Health reminds you to take steps to protect yourself against this disease.

WNV is contracted through a bite by an infected mosquito and the risk in Saskatchewan is particularly high

through July and August. To protect yourself:

- Use insect repellent containing DEET when outside;
- Wear protective clothing, particularly at dawn and dusk, and;
- Reduce mosquito habitat where you live, work, and spend your free time.

On the farm, reducing mosquito habitat means looking after the places mosquitoes like to live and develop. Mosquitoes spend their days resting in shaded spots like outbuildings, under scrub and in long grass. Take steps to keep these areas mowed and dry.

Even small amounts of water left standing for a week can produce mosquitoes. Clear yards of debris, puddles, and regularly clean and empty any items (rain barrels, tires, equipment, etc.) that collect water. It's recommended that you gravel anywhere around corrals and pens where livestock leave hoof-prints that can fill with water.

You may have larger bodies of water on your property. Lakes and rivers are not typically good habitat for mosquitoes. However, you should take extra personal protective measures if working near still sloughs or water-filled ditches.

But the summer is not all work; take precautions this summer no matter where you are. Whether camping, pulling up a lawn chair at one of the province's outdoor music festivals, walking or jogging, or picking up the occasional round of golf on the weekends, you are at risk of contracting WNV.

Remember that ***anyone can contract WNV***. Protect yourself this summer.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- On WNV in Saskatchewan, the risk in your area, or larviciding options, visit www.health.gov.sk.ca/west-nile-virus.

