



Agriculture and Markets

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

RICHARD A. BALL
Commissioner

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Dear Veterinarian:

With another summer season upon us, the New York State (NYS) Department of Agriculture and Markets and the NYS Department of Health wish to remind you that arboviruses, including eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) virus, continue to circulate in New York State, posing a risk to people, horses, and other animals.

We are asking the veterinary community to consider EEE in horses with neurologic signs, and we need your help to identify EEE cases. Signs of EEE can mimic a variety of encephalitides including rabies, West Nile virus (WNV), botulism, hepatic encephalopathy, equine protozoal myeloencephalitis (EPM), tetanus, equine herpes virus 1 (EHV-1), lead poisoning, and others. Most equine cases of EEE in NYS occur between mid-August and mid-September, although the earliest onset reported was July 14th and the latest October 21st. Our increasingly mild winter season is good reason to consider recommending that your clients vaccinate their horses against equine encephalitis viruses every 6 months, i.e. go to twice a year vaccinations.

Equine EEE cases have been detected in NYS since 1970, primarily from the four Oneida Lake Basin counties (Madison, Oneida, Onondaga and Oswego) and Suffolk County. In 2014, EEE was confirmed in horses in Madison (1), Oneida (3), Oswego (3), St. Lawrence (1), and Wayne (4) counties. The only equine case in 2013 occurred in Chautauqua County, which was the first time EEE has been detected in western NY. Historically, equine cases have also occurred in Nassau, Westchester, Ulster, Sullivan, Chemung, Lewis, and Clinton counties. Two human EEE cases were reported in 2014. Both cases survived. Single fatal human cases occurred each year from 2009 through 2011. EEE has also caused fatal infections in pheasants, quail, captive whooping cranes, emus, and, rarely, dogs.

Definitive diagnosis of EEE requires isolation of virus or viral RNA from brain tissue. Because EEE clinically resembles rabies, which is much more common in NYS, horses suspected of having EEE must be promptly evaluated for rabies due to the potential for human and other animal exposure. For postmortem testing of horses with clinically compatible illness please contact your county health department. Your county health department will arrange for rabies testing at the New York State Department of Health Wadsworth Center Rabies Laboratory. After rabies is ruled out, brain specimens will be tested for EEE and other viruses at the Wadsworth Center Arbovirus Laboratory. Additional testing for other diseases can also be arranged through the New York State Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory at Cornell (NYSVDL). Reporting and testing of neurologic horses helps to ensure timely administration of rabies postexposure treatment when needed, and advances our understanding of the distribution and spread of EEE.

To obtain the most rapid testing for other potential causes of neurologic disease, it is recommended that veterinarians send specimens to NYSVDL at the same time as the Wadsworth Center. Please contact NYSVDL at 607-253-3900; see <http://diaglab.vet.cornell.edu/> for additional information. It is essential that collection of neurologic tissue for testing at NYSVDL does not interfere with the collection of a full cross-section specimen of fresh brainstem and adequate samples of cerebellum required for rabies diagnosis at the Wadsworth Center (see <http://www.wadsworth.org/rabies/prof/livestk.htm>).

When it is not feasible to take a brain specimen (i.e., in ill horses with neurologic signs), please report the case and discuss submission of serum and/or cerebrospinal fluid for viral testing with NYSVDL. We greatly appreciate your efforts as partners in human and animal health.

Sincerely,



David C. Smith, DVM

Director, Division of Animal Industry
NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets



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State Public Health Veterinarian
NYS Department of Health

Cc: Local health departments and NYSDOH regional offices