

Infected horse reported in Keith County—no horses in Perkins County have contracted the virus.

Nebraska Agriculture Director Greg Ibach is encouraging horse owners to visit with their veterinarian about vaccinating their animals against Eastern Equine Encephalomyelitis.

A case of the mosquito-borne virus was diagnosed this week in a Keith County horse.

There have been no cases reported in Perkins County, according to Shannon Jensen, DVM at Perkins County Veterinary Hospital.

Jensen explained many ranchers and horse owners in the county get a four-way vaccination each year that includes encephalomyelitis (sleeping sickness).

The disease can be prevented, and if a horse gets it, it's because they've not been properly cared for, she explained.

Eastern Equine Encephalomyelitis (EEE) is a viral disease of the equine species that is transmitted primarily by infected mosquitoes.

It affects an animal's central nervous system.

"This case serves as a reminder to equine owners to visit with their veterinarian regarding measures that can protect their animals from disease," ag director Ibach said.

State Veterinarian Dennis Hughes said vaccines are available to protect against EEE, and it is not too late in the season to consider this option.

“Vaccination will help prevent the horse from contracting the virus, and if they do get it, improve their chances of survival,” Hughes said.

Some clinical symptoms of EEE-infected horses include fever, loss of appetite, weakness, lack of coordination, irritability and abnormal sensitivity to light and sound.

Dr. Jensen said the symptoms are similar to West Nile Virus and there is no specific treatment.

Horse owners are encouraged to take general mosquito-control measures, such as eliminating pools of standing water.

Hughes said owners also may consider moving animals indoors during dawn and dusk, when mosquitoes are most active.

Other preventative measures include: avoid turning on lights inside the stable during evening and overnight; remove birds that are in, or close to, the stable; and use mosquito repellents.

Humans also can contract the EEE virus through the bite of an infected mosquito. Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services Public Health Veterinarian Annette Bredthauer said human cases are rare, but can be severe causing hospitalization and even death.

People should take general precautions to protect themselves from mosquito bites, such as wearing insect repellent, wearing protective clothing, especially during dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active, and eliminating standing water to reduce mosquito breeding sites.

More information on EEE can be found at www.agr.ne.gov under the Animal Health section.

To report suspected cases of EEE, contact a local veterinarian, NDA's Bureau of Animal at (402) 471-2351, or United States Department of Agriculture/APHIS/Veterinary Services at (402) 434-2300.