

**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES - DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES  
PUBLIC HEALTH - DISEASE CONTROL PROGRAMS  
VETERINARY PUBLIC HEALTH AND RABIES CONTROL**

**West Nile Virus in Horses**

Of the horses that become ill with West Nile virus, over one third will die. There are two commercial vaccines used to protect horses against West Nile virus. A killed virus and a virus modified with canarypox are used in the community. The vaccines can be obtained from veterinarians, feed stores, and the internet.

Veterinary Public Health and Rabies Control recommends that veterinarians vaccinate horses against West Nile virus. Veterinarians also recommend West Nile virus vaccination to their horse clients. Their financially well off clients often follow the veterinarian's recommendations. However, California horse owners in general, have been slow to vaccinate due to the expense and the lack of equine cases in the past.

Veterinary Public Health and Rabies Control published an article (West Nile Arrives in California. *PULSE* 44(12). 2002) alerting local veterinarians of the arrival of West Nile in California. The article discussed how the disease is transmitted and how it can be prevented.

Now, with numerous positive West Nile birds in Los Angeles County and confirmed equine cases of West Nile WNV in adjacent counties (Riverside County and San Bernardino County), horse owners are beginning to panic and rushing to vaccinate their horses. It usually takes three to four weeks following vaccination before much immunity develops. A single dose does not provide much protection. Two doses are recommended, followed by annual booster vaccinations.

The San Gabriel Valley Tribune reported on 6/30/04 that eight horses with WNV have detected in Southern California. Steve Kyle, Ontario office - California Department of Food and Agriculture has supplied information to the press.  
<http://www.sgvtribune.com/Stories/0,1413,205%257E12220%257E2245364,00.html?search=filter>

In Los Angeles County the health officer is responsible for both human and animal diseases. Animal disease control falls under Los Angeles County Title 10, Division 2 - Animal Health.

In 1971, when Venezuelan Equine encephalomyelitis (VEE) entered Southern California, the Board of Supervisors made it mandatory that all horses in Los Angeles County be vaccinated against the virus. This disease is also transmitted by mosquitoes. However, that mandate was for a very limited time. The military had stockpiled VEE for use in people in case of a biological attack. Some horse owners were reluctant to use the vaccine untried in horses, but they had no choice.