

Veterinarian explains how to reduce risk of pets getting West Nile virus

June 17 2015

Mosquito season is arriving early thanks to recent weather patterns, which means it's time to start prevention measures a little sooner—not only for humans, but also for susceptible pets.

"Our [weather patterns](#) have been quite abrupt and with the moisture that we've had, coupled with the really [warm temperatures](#), [mosquitoes](#) are really taking off," said Elizabeth Davis, professor and section head of equine medicine and surgery at Kansas State University. "The Kansas Department of Health and Environment mosquito surveillance in the state of Kansas has found that the levels of Culex mosquitoes, which effectively transmit West Nile virus, are already higher than they were in all of 2014."

The levels now are even greater than the levels observed in June 2013 when the state of Kansas had 92 human West Nile cases. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment has already confirmed one positive case this year.

Reducing the risk of West Nile virus in humans, horses and other animals is about taking precautions early, Davis says. For certain animals like horses, vaccines are an option.

"Right now is the ideal time to vaccinate your horse if you have not done so already," Davis said. "Working with your veterinarian to design an ideal protocol is a great way to know that you are protecting your horse against all possible disease threats. Once the vaccine has been

administered, it usually takes about two weeks to get a good booster reaction and that protection is going to last at least six months. If you vaccinate now, you're going to have horses that are very well protected through the warm weather, which in this area is going to extend through early October."

While West Nile virus does not cause disease in small animals like dogs and cats, Davis said that mosquitoes can transmit various infectious diseases as well as a parasite that can cause heartworm disease in dogs and cats. Therefore, for many reasons it is beneficial to minimize mosquito populations.

Minimizing mosquito populations at this time of year can have several benefits, according to Davis.

"Ways that we can do that are to identify areas that mosquito breeding might be taking place, such as standing water in old tires, a water trough or even a birdbath. Empty those as soon as possible," Davis said. "If you need to leave water out for your animals, clean those areas at least once a week, if not more frequently, and that will really diminish the number of mosquito populations that are breeding and potentially harboring this virus."

Symptoms of West Nile vary in humans and animals, but the virus is potentially deadly to both. For humans, symptoms can range from a headache and fever to swelling of the brain and death. For horses, symptoms range from mild—fever or change of appetite—to severe, such as neurologic disorders.

Provided by Kansas State University

Citation: Veterinarian explains how to reduce risk of pets getting West Nile virus (2015, June 17)

retrieved 6 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-06-veterinarian-pets-west-nile-virus.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.