



STATE OF MARYLAND

DHMH

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
201 W. Preston Street • Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Martin O'Malley, Governor – Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor – John M. Colmers, Secretary

July 7, 2009

Dear Maryland Veterinarian:

Arboviral surveillance season has begun, and we are writing to provide updated guidelines for equine arboviral surveillance in Maryland in 2009 and to remind you that equine neurologic syndrome and any of the equine encephalitides, including West Nile virus (WNV), are reportable to the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) Animal Health section. The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) offers laboratory testing of equine specimens for WNV and other arboviruses, and we encourage you to make use of this service.

Arboviral disease continues to have an impact on both the human and animal populations in Maryland. Since the emergence of West Nile virus in the State in 1999, there have been 171 human WNV cases, 273 equine cases, 342 positive mosquito pools, and 1250 positive birds reported in Maryland. Reported equine WNV cases increased from 30 in 2002 to 234 in 2003 and have declined sharply since that time, with only one equine WNV infection reported in Maryland in 2004, two in 2008 and none in the intervening years. In addition, Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) virus has been detected in Maryland horses (2003) as well as in mosquitoes and, less frequently, ratites (2003, 2005, and 2008).

As in previous years, the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) will work with the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) to conduct equine surveillance. From June 1 – October 31, 2009, the DHMH Laboratories Administration will accept serum, brain, and/or CSF samples from horses exhibiting clinical signs consistent with arboviral disease for testing.

The lab offers free of charge:

- WNV and EEE polymerase chain reaction (PCR) on brain tissue, and
- WNV IgM capture ELISA on CSF and/or serum samples

Please note the following guidelines:

- For serological testing, the Serological Testing form (DHMH Form 4677) should be completed. The submitter should fill out all required information in the blue section and note any clinical signs under the Arbovirus/West Nile Virus Panel section.
- For culture and viral isolation, the Infectious Agents: Culture/Detection form (DHMH Form 4676) should be used. The submitter should fill out all pertinent information in the yellow section and place the appropriate specimen code in the box next to Arbovirus Panel.
- For both of the above forms, write "EQUINE" across the top of the form.
- Any veterinarian or other individual submitting equine specimens for arboviral testing should complete one or both of the above forms (copies are attached). A separate Testing Form must accompany each specimen.

- Complete contact information must be included, including the owner's address and phone number and the address where the horse is stabled. The specimen will not be tested without this information.
- The form should be completed legibly, preferably using block letters.
- Only specimens from horses exhibiting neurologic signs consistent with arboviral infection will be accepted for testing; the laboratory will not test samples from asymptomatic animals or to determine response to vaccination.
- The Maryland DHMH Laboratories Administration will not accept specimens from horses that are stabled outside of Maryland.
- To request the above laboratory testing forms, please contact the DHMH Laboratories Administration, Outfit Preparation Unit at 410-767-6120. Please limit your request to only the quantity that will meet your immediate needs.
- For questions regarding equine laboratory testing at the DHMH Laboratories Administration, please call 410-767-6153.

In addition to the services offered by the DHMH Laboratories Administration, necropsies are also available for a fee at any of the five MDA Animal Health Diagnostic Laboratories. Necropsies may not always be available on a given day, but every effort will be made to assist with alternate arrangements.

As always, regular vaccination of equines is encouraged. Two vaccines are currently available: the Fort Dodge Innovator™ West Nile Virus equine vaccine, a killed virus vaccine, and the RECOMBITEK® vaccine, developed using recombinant DNA technology by Merial. Each of these vaccines should be administered according to manufacturer instructions. It is also recommended that horses be vaccinated annually against rabies and EEE.

Information about arboviral and other infectious diseases in equines can be obtained from the Animal Health section of the MDA at www.mda.state.md.us/animal_health/diseases/reportable.php or at (410) 841-5810. General information on WNV and other arboviruses (including fact sheets and brochures) is available on the Maryland West Nile Virus web page at www.edcp.org/html/west_nile.html and from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile.

If you have any other questions or concerns about WNV or wish to receive additional brochures, please contact the Center for Veterinary Public Health at (410) 767-5649.

Sincerely,



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