

CHALLENGES AHEAD!



With global warming now having a significant effect on our climate, we are seeing insect populations moving gradually north as global temperatures rise. These insects can carry viruses with them as the farming community are all too aware. You may have heard of a disease called Blue Tongue caused by a virus brought by midges from the continent and it is having a devastating effect in some areas affecting cattle and sheep, with many sheep dying. It is highly likely, soon, our horse population will be vulnerable to a similar scenario.



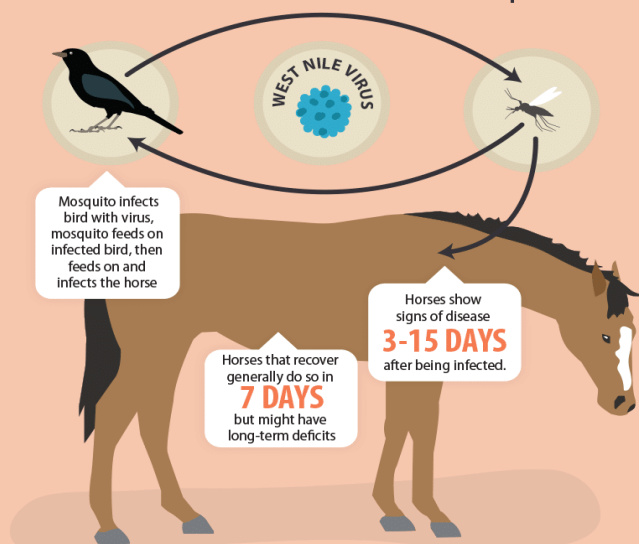
WEST NILE FEVER - is a viral disease carried by mosquitoes. It is widespread in the USA and several European countries.

The disease: -

Horses are infected by being bitten by infected mosquitoes. Birds act as carriers spreading the virus when they migrate. The virus attacks the nervous system.

WHAT IS WEST NILE VIRUS?

A flavivirus that needs to be inside a host to replicate.



Clinical signs: -

Luckily most horses show only very mild clinical signs, but up to 10% may be severely affected. They have a fever, become lethargic, may stumble and become uncoordinated.

Treatment: - this is supportive only, anti-inflammatories, fluids and slings if recumbent.

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PREVENTION

The disease is not infectious so does not spread from horse to horse. Several vaccines are available, like flu vacs, two doses a month apart with an annual booster is recommended.

WNF is a Notifiable disease, which means any suspected cases have to be reported to APHA [Animal & Plant Health Agency]. They will require the horse to be blood tested for the virus and will put in place control measures. At present a few cases have been identified in the UK limited to horses that have come from abroad, but it seems highly likely this is a disease we will see in the future.

At present vector tracking is carried out in the UK in both mosquitoes and dead birds to see if the virus has reached us.



AFRICAN HORSE SICKNESS

This is another viral disease carried by insects, in this case, midges.

At present it is seen in Sub-Saharan Africa but again with rising global temperatures this might change.

AHS is a severe haemorrhagic disease seen in several different forms.

Acute: - Pulmonary form leading to fever, breathing difficulty, coughing and a nasal discharge.

Subacute: - Cardiac form, fever, colic, swelling of eyes, head, neck and chest.

If both forms are seen together, there may be up to 80 % mortality.

African Horse sickness fever is a milder form seen in endemic populations with natural resistance, ie Donkeys and Zebra.

There is a vaccine against the disease but not available in the EU. It is a live vaccine and therefore carries the risk of leading to infection in areas where the disease is not seen.

AHS is also a notifiable disease and like WNF does not spread between horses



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