West Nile Virus (WNV) affects humans, horses, and many types of birds. It is carried by mosquitoes and transmitted through a mosquito bite. Birds are considered reservoirs of the disease.

**West Nile Virus Cases in Pennsylvania**

In 2012, Pennsylvania tested 39,230 samples of dead birds, mosquito samples, and mosquito pools. From these, 3,420 mosquitoes tests were positive, 135 avian (birds) tests were positive, and 51 veterinary tests were positive (49 of which were horses). 60 humans also contracted the disease; four of these cases were fatal.

**Symptoms of the Virus in Equines**

The virus causes inflammation of the brain in horses. Equines that contract the virus can experience lack of coordination, stumbling, confusion, fever, stiffness, muscle twitching, depression, and weakness in the legs. About one-third of infected horses die.

**Protect Your Horses Through Immunization**

A vaccine for horses is available through veterinarians. Owners should keep records of vaccination, because a blood test cannot distinguish between vaccinated and infected horses. This may affect international shipping. The vaccine required two doses given three to six weeks apart. Immunity may not be achieved until up to six weeks after the second dose, and some horses may require a third vaccination. An annual booster should be given in accordance with the vaccine manufacturer's instructions and ideally prior to the start of mosquito season in your area.

**If You Suspect Your Horse Is Infected**

Contact your veterinarian for an examination. Veterinarians are required to report horses showing clinical signs. Testing is available through your veterinarian and the Pennsylvania Diagnostic Laboratory System (PADLS).

**Minimize the Threat of Exposure For You and Your Horses**

The best way to minimize the threat of West Nile Virus is to control mosquito populations and prevent exposure to them.

- Eliminate sources of standing water that can serve as a breeding ground for mosquitoes including old tires, buckets, wading pools, and other containers. Change water in bird baths weekly.
- Report the suspicious illness or death of birds to your county health department or to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture’s West Nile Virus Coordinator at 717.783.6897.
- Consider avoiding outdoor activities from dusk until dawn or take extra care to use repellent and protective clothing during evening and early morning. When possible, wear long sleeves, long pants, and socks when outdoors.
- Treating clothes with repellents containing permethrin, DEET, or oil of lemon eucalyptus will provide extra protection since most mosquitoes may bite through thin clothing. Please follow the manufacturer’s recommendations regarding proper and safe application of any repellent, especially on children.

For more information on West Nile Virus in Pennsylvania, visit [www.westnile.state.pa.us](http://www.westnile.state.pa.us).