



Media Statement

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Kunjin virus confirmed as cause of neurological disease in three WA horses

The Department of Agriculture and Food's Animal Health Laboratories have confirmed three recent cases of neurological disease in horses in Western Australia were caused by Kunjin virus, which is spread by infected mosquitoes.

Acting Chief Veterinary Officer Peter Morcombe said the affected horses were from areas north and east of Perth and in the Goldfields.

He said Kunjin virus was commonly found in mosquitoes in the Kimberley and the Pilbara and it was unusual to find horses affected by the virus outside of these areas.

"At this stage, the department does not expect to see many more cases of affected horses as mosquito numbers should decline with cooler weather," Dr Morcombe said.

"Only a very small number of horses develop signs after infection with Kunjin virus. However, horse owners are advised to watch for signs of neurological disease in their horses, such as stopping eating, depression, lethargy, a stiff gait, lack of coordination and falling over.

"Horses with Kunjin disease are not contagious to people, other horses or other animals, however horse owners should contact their private veterinarian or district veterinary officer from the Department immediately if their horse shows neurological signs. Veterinarians can advise on diagnosis, protective clothing and other issues related to neurological diseases in horses.

"Horse handlers and veterinarians are always advised to wear personal protective equipment whenever handling horses with neurological signs."

Dr Morcombe also recommended that horse owners reduce their horses' exposure to mosquitoes where possible.

"Eliminating mosquito breeding sites, trapping, housing horses between dusk and dawn, turning off lights inside stables, using fluorescent lights, screening stable windows, fogging and using fans and automatic overhead misting systems will all reduce the chance of mosquitoes biting your horses and subsequent infection," Dr Morcombe said.

"Registered insect repellents, rugs, hoods and mesh fly veils with ear covers and fly boots are also recommended."

Dr Morcombe said the neurological signs in the WA cases were similar to those seen this year in eastern Australia, which have been attributed to Murray Valley Encephalitis and Kunjin virus following flooding and increased mosquito activity in those areas.

For more information on neurological disease in horses, contact the department's Animal Health Laboratories on 9368 3351.

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