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April 1, 2019

To: California Veterinarians in Large Animal Practice
Public Health Laboratory Directors
Local Health Officers
Communicable Disease Controllers
Public Health Veterinarians
Animal Health Branch Personnel
Other Interested Parties

Subject: SURVEILLANCE AND REPORTING OF EQUINE WEST NILE VIRUS

West Nile virus (WNV) continues to be an important cause of mosquito-borne neurologic illness and death among humans and horses in California. The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) and the California Animal Health and Food Safety Laboratory encourage timely and accurate identification of WNV infection in horses in 2019. Detailed instructions for submitting **equine specimens to the California Animal Health and Food Safety (CAHFS) Laboratory for WNV testing are provided in Attachment A.**

Timely and accurate reporting of suspect equine WNV cases by veterinarians to local health officials is a valuable component of arbovirus disease surveillance and helps to direct mosquito control efforts designed to prevent WNV infection in both horses and humans. It is very important that information on each laboratory submission form is complete and accurate; incomplete submission forms may result in a delay in reporting while CDFA officials contact the veterinary clinic and/or horse owner to obtain the missing information. When completing the specimen submission form, please pay special attention to:

- **The exact physical location(s) of the horse during the two weeks prior to the onset of clinical disease.** (Please ensure that this information is included in addition to accurate owner contact information.)
- **Detailed clinical signs and signalment.**
- **The present condition of the horse (including whether it survived, died, or was euthanized).**
- **An accurate vaccination history.**

Signs of WNV can be similar to any neurological disease affecting horses including Equine Herpesvirus Myeloencephalopathy (EHM), Equine Protozoal Myeloencephalitis (EPM), hepatic encephalopathy and cervical vertebral myelopathy (wobbler syndrome). Rabies must always be considered as a differential diagnosis and appropriate precautions taken when evaluating any horse with signs of encephalitis. Rabies suspects should be reported to the local health department. Contact information for all California local health departments is available at: http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/Documents/LHD_CD_Contact_Info.pdf.

Horse owners are urged to ensure that their horse is current on WNV vaccination. A comprehensive vaccination plan should be developed in consultation with the veterinary practitioner. Commercially available WNV vaccine products have been shown to provide a high level of protection when used in accordance with the manufacturer's labeled directions. Please note that vaccination does not interfere with WNV IgM serum testing.

Your participation in this important public health program is greatly appreciated. For more information on WNV please visit the California WNV website at http://www.westnile.ca.gov and CDFA WNV website at http://cdfa.ca.gov/ahfss/Animal_Health/WNV_Info.html

If you require additional information, please contact Dr. Katie Flynn, Equine Staff Veterinarian for CDFA Animal Health Branch at 916-900-5039.

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Attachment

Protocol for Submission of Laboratory Specimens for Equine Neurological Disease Diagnosis and Surveillance