



## THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SEPT. 6, 2007

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# Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., urges horse owners to vaccinate against West Nile virus after pony dies

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., and the Navajo Nation Veterinary & Livestock Program has urged horse owners to get their horses vaccinated against West Nile Virus following news of a horse death at Canyon de Chelly last week.

Today, the Veterinary Program issued an equine advisory that calls upon horse owners to take precautions to protect their animals.

“The most important thing you can do for your horses right now is to have them vaccinated against this dangerous disease,” President Shirley said. “We have the means to keep your animals safe for a very low cost. It is worth the life of your animals to have them vaccinated right now.”

The Navajo Nation Veterinary Program reported that the first equine death from the virus occurred Aug. 28 when an unvaccinated three-year-old pony died from the virus. It had shown signs of weakness, staggering, and facial twitching before it went down and died, said Chinle veterinarian Dr. Scott Bender.

He said it had started showing symptoms only two days earlier. Given an earlier report of the virus being present in the Many Farms area and the increase in the mosquito population in the last several weeks, Dr. Bender said it is likely more cases will be seen.

“The disease is always here,” he said. “It’s endemic now. It has moved into our country.”

He said mosquitoes that carry the virus pass it on to the next generation, and that once established remains in an area forever.

He said with two recent big rainstorms, the mosquito population has dramatically increased, raising the likelihood of other horses being infected with the disease.

The prevention against it is vaccinations, he said.

“One vaccination does not provide total protection in that you’ve got to make sure that all animals that have never been vaccinated get a booster shot,” he said. “And then we want to make sure that the animals remain safe, and so every year they need a booster shot and that’s to keep their immunity current.”

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– Dr. Scott Bender

He said one in three horses that show signs of West Nile will die, and that one in 100 horses will become infected.

The Navajo Nation Veterinary Program began trapping mosquitoes for testing in 1999 in cooperation with the Arizona Department of Public Health.

The first positive sample of West Nile Virus came from Many Farms on Aug. 1

While there is no way to eradicate it from the environment, the Navajo Nation has an adequate supply of vaccine, and all horse owners are strongly encouraged to have their horses vaccinated.

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