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Kansas horses endangered by mosquitoes

by Jim Grawe

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(WICHITA, Kan.)

Kansas is horse country, but they're outnumbered by the mosquitoes which are multiplying.

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"We've noticed a huge number of mosquitoes that are out, and they're starting to bite," Hope in the Valley Equine Rescue's Ande Miller says.

It's the result of all the rain and flooding. The tiny bloodsuckers can infect people with diseases, but Miller says horses seem to be even more vulnerable.

"They're just very prone to contracting the West Nile virus, which is a really horrible neurological disease," Miller says. "Most of the time it's fatal."

And, it's perhaps more fatal to horses than most animals, according to veterinarian Leslie Mikos.

"Maybe the horse just more delicate or more fragile in that state," Dr. Mikos says. "We're very concerned about the mosquito population increasing."

Mikos says an annual vaccine is the best way to protect horses from West Nile. At Hope in the Valley they also spray the animals with repellent.

Mosquitoes breed in standing water. They'll breed in the water tanks where horses drink if that water isn't treated.

There have been no confirmed cases of West Nile in Kansas horses so far this year. Dr. Mikos suspects it's because so many Kansans have had their horses vaccinated against a threat that isn't going away anytime soon.

The mosquitoes will die off when the ground freezes in the fall.

Dogs can contract heartworm from mosquitoes. Dr. Mikos suggests dog owners get their dogs treated to prevent it.

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