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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Grant County Horse Tests positive for West Nile Virus
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The Grant County Health Department and the Oregon Department of Human Services announces today that a Mt. Vernon horse has tested positive for West Nile virus.

It is important to note that the virus is passed by mosquitoes, not by horse-to-horse, or horse-to-human contact," says Dr. Don Hansen, state veterinarian. West Nile virus is an infection that lives in birds. It is spread when a mosquito feeds on an infected bird then bites a human or a horse. Birds cannot transmit the disease to humans, nor can it be transmitted through person-to-person contact.

It is important for individuals to take precautions against mosquitoes by protecting themselves. Doctor's Hansen and Emilio DeBess, public health veterinarian in the Oregon Department of Human Services, urge the following actions to help prevent the spread of the disease.

Protect yourself.

"The virus also affects humans. We encourage people to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes," says Dr. DeBess.

The hours at dusk and dawn are peak mosquito biting times. Consider avoiding outdoor activities during these times or take extra care to use repellent that contains DEET and follow the label directions. Wear protective clothing during evening and early morning hours.

Make sure that doors and windows have tight-fitting screens. Repair or replace screens that have tears or holes.

Observe and report. If people find a dead bird and are concerned about what to do with it, they should report it to their local health department or vector control agency.

Control mosquito breeding sites.

Help reduce the number of mosquitoes in outdoor areas by draining sources of standing water; for example, leaf-clogged gutters, birdbaths and old tires. In this way, you reduce the number of places mosquitoes can lay their eggs and breed.

Vaccinate your horses.

For the best protection, horses need to be given two doses: an initial dose and a booster dose 21 days later. If your horse has already been vaccinated with both doses consult your veterinarian about the need for a booster at this time. If your horse has not been vaccinated you are encouraged to vaccinate now.

The virus can infect the central nervous system of horses and cause symptoms of encephalitis. Clinical signs of encephalitis in horses include weakness or paralysis of hind limbs, hyper-excitability, ataxia (un-coordination), and convulsions. It is important to note that not all horses with clinical signs of encephalitis have West Nile encephalitis. Call your veterinarian immediately if you witness any of the above symptoms in your horses.