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WNV: An International Perspective

Most American owners are aware of the increased number of West Nile virus (WNV) cases confirmed in the U.S. horse population this year. What they might not know is how the virus affects horses in other countries.

According to C.J. (Kate) Savage, BVSc (Hons), MS, PhD, Dipl. ACVIM, WEVA Oceanic delegate, a similar virus—Kunjin—is endemic in parts of Australia.

"(Kunjin) is antigenically and genetically similar to WNV and was reclassified as a subtype of WNV in 1999," she said.

Parts of Australia suffered a large equine WNV/Kunjin outbreak in 2011, she said, after which Frost et al. identified a new WNV strain as the cause.

"The new strain appears to invade nervous tissue to a greater degree than the original Kunjin virus," she said.

New Zealand is WNV-free, Savage said.

Sandro Barbacini, DVM, Italian WEVA board member, said that Northern Italy saw WNV outbreaks several years ago, but it has not been affected in the last few years.

Swiss WEVA board member Vincent Gerber, PhD, DVM, Dipl. ACVIM, ECEIM, FVH, said that Switzerland remains WNV-free to date.

Siraya Chunekamrai, DVM, PhD, WEVA's Thai board member, said studies carried out in native ponies found positive WNV titers despite an absence of clinical signs.

Finally, India-based Ravi Reddy, BVSc, MRCVS, WEVA president, said that although blood samples from some horses exhibiting "strange" neurologic signs had sero-positive WNV titers, "We believe this is an incidental finding and not the cause of this present disease." There have been no reports of WNV isolation from Indian horses, he said.

For more information about equine WNV worldwide, visit TheHorse.com/20712.

—Erica Larson

The Horse is an official Media Partner of the World Equine Veterinary Association (WEVA), a continuing education organization and not-for-profit charity. Look for future WEVA communications in this location.