



New World Screwworm (NWS)

Public Frequently Asked Questions – General Information

What is New World Screwworm?

New World Screwworm (NWS) is a parasitic fly whose larva (maggot) can infest wounds and mucous membranes (e.g., mouth, nose, eyes, genitalia, anus) in any warm-blooded animal. Unlike many maggots that feed on dead tissue, New World Screwworm maggots feed on living tissue. This can cause serious injury, infection, and even death if the animal is not quickly treated.

Why is it called “screwworm”?

NWS maggots have small ridges on their body that resemble the ridges of a screw. They also burrow into wounds to feed on living tissue, causing the wound to enlarge and deepen.

Which animals can become infested with New World Screwworm?

Any warm-blooded animal can become infested with NWS. Animals with open wounds are at higher risk, as NWS flies are attracted to the scent of a wound.

At-risk animals include:

- Cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, and other livestock
- Horses
- Dogs and cats
- Wildlife
- Zoo animals
- Birds and other warm-blooded animals
- Rarely, people

Can people get New World Screwworm?

Yes, but human cases are rare. People with open wounds should protect the wound from flies, especially when traveling in areas where NWS is known to be present. If you notice maggots in a wound, you should immediately seek medical care. For more information, please visit the California Department of Public Health’s (CDPH) website:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Screwworm.aspx>

Why are officials concerned?

NWS can spread when infested animals are moved from one area to another. California has

many pets, livestock, horses, wildlife, and zoo animals that could be affected if the pest becomes established in California.

How do animals become infested?

Female screwworm flies (*Cochliomyia hominivorax*) lay eggs on or near wounds or mucous membranes. After the eggs hatch, the maggots enter or establish a wound and feed on living tissue.

Wounds or mucous membranes may include:

- Cuts or scratches
- Tick bites
- Surgical sites
- The umbilicus (belly button area) of newborn animals
- Ears
- Nose or mouth
- Genital areas
- Any moist or irritated skin

What signs should I look for in my animals?

Contact your veterinarian if you notice:

- A wound that is getting worse instead of healing
- A bad smell coming from a wound
- Maggots in or near a wound
- Bleeding or discharge
- Swelling
- An animal licking, biting, shaking, or scratching at one area
- A wound developing after traveling from an area where NWS is present

What should I do if I find maggots in my animal's wound?

Immediately call your veterinarian and report the suspected case to CDFA. Do not move the animal to another property unless your veterinarian or a state or federal animal health official tells you to do so. If possible, keep the animal away from other animals and prevent flies from reaching the wound. Your veterinarian can treat the animal and help determine whether the larvae need to be reported and tested.

Should I remove the maggots myself?

If your animal has maggots in a wound, contact a veterinarian as soon as possible. Removing larvae without veterinary care may leave some maggots behind and make it harder to identify

the cause of the infestation. In addition, screwworm maggots must be properly disposed of to avoid propagating the fly. A veterinarian will know how to properly dispose of the maggots.

Is New World Screwworm reportable?

Yes. New World Screwworm is a reportable animal disease. Veterinarians and animal health officials must be notified when it is suspected within 24 hours. If you are an animal owner, your first step should be to contact your veterinarian. Your veterinarian can help report the concern to the proper animal health officials.

Can my pet get New World Screwworm?

Yes. Dogs, cats, and other pet mammals can get New World Screwworm if they have wounds or irritated skin that flies can reach. Pets that recently traveled from affected areas should be checked carefully for wounds.

What should I do before traveling with animals?

Before traveling, make sure animals are healthy and free of open wounds. If your animal has a wound, have it checked by a veterinarian before traveling. After traveling, check your animal daily for wounds, swelling, drainage, or signs of pain. Tell your veterinarian where your animal has traveled if you seek care.

How can I protect my animals?

You can help protect animals by:

- Checking animals regularly for wounds
- Keeping wounds clean and covered
- Contacting a veterinarian for wounds that do not heal
- Controlling flies around animals
- Following animal movement rules
- Avoiding travel with animals that have open wounds unless cleared by a veterinarian
- Reporting concerns quickly

Is the food supply safe?

Yes. New World Screwworm is not a food safety concern. It does not infest meat, milk, eggs, fruits, or vegetables. The main concern with NWS is protecting live animals and preventing the pest from becoming established in the state.

How is New World Screwworm controlled?

Animal health officials use several tools to control NWS, including animal inspections, movement restrictions, treatment of affected animals, fly surveillance, and public education/outreach. One important tool is the release of sterile male NWS flies. Female NWS flies only mate once during their lifespan. When sterile male flies mate with wild female flies,

the eggs do not hatch, resulting in the end of that fly's life cycle. Over time, this can reduce the fly population.

What is California doing to prepare for NWS?

California is monitoring the current NWS situation and working with federal, state, and local partners. The goal is to prevent NWS from entering California and to respond quickly if a suspected case is found. NWS fly surveillance traps and sample submissions, public outreach, animal movement restrictions, and the creation of preemptive readiness plans are some of the current efforts being conducted at the state and federal levels.

Which preventative drugs are available to use to avoid NWS animal infestations?

Please discuss potential NWS prevention and treatment options with your veterinarian. Animal drugs for NWS that are either approved, conditionally approved, or emergency use authorized can be found on the FDA website: <https://www.fda.gov/animal-veterinary/safety-health/new-world-screwworm-information-veterinarians>. Prescription drugs must be prescribed by a licensed veterinarian and administered through a veterinary-client-patient relationship (VCPR) to treat or prevent NWS myiasis in animals.

What is the most important thing for the public to remember?

Regularly checking your animals for wounds, especially after travel, is essential for the early detection of potential cases of NWS. If you see maggots in a wound or a wound that smells bad, gets worse, or does not heal, call your veterinarian right away.

Early reporting protects your animal and helps protect California.

Contact Information

- California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) Animal Health Branch: [CDFA - AHFSS - AHB](#)
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW): [California Department of Fish and Wildlife Home Page](#)
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) APHIS: [New World Screwworm](#)
- California Department of Public Health (CDPH): [CDPH Home](#)

To report suspected cases of NWS, please call **1-866-922-2473**.