New World Screwworm FAQs

What is New World screwworm (NWS)?

New World screwworm (NWS) are larvae of the NWS fly (Cochliomyia hominivorax), that cause a painful condition known as myiasis.

What is myiasis?

Myiasis is a parasitic infestation of larvae on live tissue of warm-blooded mammals including livestock, wildlife, and pets. It occurs when NWS flies lay eggs in open wounds or other exposed areas of soft tissue like the eye, naval, or genital area. These eggs hatch into dangerous parasitic larvae which burrow or “screw” into flesh with sharp mouth hooks. As the wound becomes larger, more eggs are laid and the process repeats. Infestations can cause severe and sometimes fatal damage, especially if left untreated.

How is NWS spread?

The average life cycle of a NWS is 10-30 days. During this time adult flies mate, the female lays eggs on the edge of an open wound or exposed area of soft tissue, eggs hatch into larvae within 10-12 hours of being laid, the larvae burrow into the wound and feed on living tissue, then mature larvae drop to the ground and burrow into the soil to pupate, which then emerge as adult flies in as little as 7 days, starting the cycle over.

Adult NWS flies can fly as far as 12 miles in search of a suitable host. The movement of infested livestock or wildlife can lead to the spread in even greater distances.

What can I do to protect my animals, property and myself?

The best way to protect yourself is to monitor your animals or wildlife on your property for any signs and report suspicions immediately. For all livestock, equine and pets, reports should be made to Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC). All suspicions in wildlife should be made to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD).

What signs should I look for in animals that might have NWS?

NWS infestations occur in a wound or any soft tissue of live, warm-blooded animals. The presence of larvae or a wound that increases in size over a couple of days should immediately be reported as susceptible NWS infestation. Producers, wildlife managers, and landowners should be alert for any of the following:

- Irritated behavior
- Head shaking
- The smell of decayed flesh
- The presence of larvae in a wound
- Biting or licking at wounds

What kind of wounds should I monitor?

NWS can infest a wide variety of wounds:

- Branding site
- Castration site
- Dehorning wound
- Ear notch or tagging site
- Scratch or cut
- Tick bite
- Umbilical cord
- Eye, naval or genital area
- Any open wound or other exposed areas of soft tissue

What steps do I take if I have a NWS infestation?

If you suspect a NWS infestation, you should report it to TAHC or TPWD immediately, and consult with your veterinarian for treatment.

How is the spread of NWS stopped?

Breeding sterile flies is the only proven technique to eradicate NWS.

Screwworm Coalition of Texas

East Foundation
Exotic Wildlife Association
Independent Cattlemen's Association of Texas
Livestock Marketing Association of Texas
South Texans’ Property Rights Association
Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association
Texas Association of Dairymen
Texas Cattle Feeders Association
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