Best Friends Network Partners

New World Screwworm

What Network Partners Need to Know

Last Updated: June 26, 2026

New World Screwworm (*Cochliomyia hominivorax*) was confirmed in South Texas on June 3, 2026, marking its return to the U.S. for the first time since eradication in 1966. **It's important not to panic, but to be prepared: New World Screwworm (NWS) is preventable and treatable.**

New World Screwworm (NWS) is a parasitic fly whose larvae burrow into body openings of living animals including wounds, surgical incisions, exposed navels of newborn pets and sometimes orifices. They are highly treatable when caught early but can progress quickly and cause damage or even death if left untreated.

This guide helps you make simple, proactive adjustments to your protocols to protect your shelter population from NWS. It applies to all shelters and rescues — organizations near confirmed cases should adopt the protocols immediately, and those not yet affected should use this time to build a plan, since conditions can change quickly.

What Is It?

Most fly larvae feed on dead tissue. Screwworm larvae are different: they burrow into living tissue through open wounds, surgical incisions, or mucous membranes. Infestations can progress quickly and can be fatal if left untreated. The female fly is strongly attracted to wounds, so any warm-blooded animal with an open wound is at elevated risk.

Who Needs to Pay Attention?

Areas of New Mexico and Texas with confirmed cases and other high-risk area animal shelters and rescues should treat this as an immediate action item. All organizations should be tracking any changes to travel and import restrictions and monitoring this interactive heat map for infected areas.

The AVMA has confirmed that travel makes it possible for NWS to be introduced into any U.S. state — not just states close to the southern border. The fly's seasonal range extends well north, potentially as far as Canada.

What This Means for Your Shelter

Every animal in your care deserves a safe path to a home. Protecting them from this pest is a direct extension of your lifesaving mission. Here are the key actions to take now:

Check your animals.

Do daily hands-on wound inspections for every animal in your care. Look for enlarging wounds, foul odor, blood-tinged drainage, unexplained pain, head shaking, excessive licking, or visible larvae. If you find maggots, isolate the animal and contact your veterinarian immediately. Maggots should be submitted to your vet to confirm whether they are screwworms. *Do not let discarded maggots fall onto the ground as this will cause spread.* **Euthanasia of an animal does not kill larvae.** Carcasses must be frozen or incinerated. Burial alone will not prevent further infestation. Treating the host animal with FDA approved medications is the most effective way to kill the larvae.

How can someone "test" for screwworms? Screwworms are detected through a hands-on nose to tail inspection of animals — checking all wounds, orifices (ears, nose, mouth, genitals), skin folds, and moist areas for eggs, larvae, unusual odor, or tissue damage. No special equipment is needed. If larvae are found or strongly suspected, isolate the animal to facilitate the observation of the larvae if they fall to the ground. Collect a sample to submit to a USDA-approved lab for species confirmation. Lab results typically take 1–5 business days.

Stock the right medications.

Talk to your shelter vet about having appropriate medications on hand. The FDA maintains a current, updated list of approved and emergency-authorized products for NWS. Credelio/lotilaner, NexGard/afoxolaner, Credelio CAT, and nitenpyram are among the options currently in use but it is always important to confirm with your vet what is authorized at the time of treatment. See: FDA: NWS Information for Veterinarians

Every companion-animal medicine authorization is for treatment of an existing infestation, not prevention, so using these products as a means of prevention is an extrapolation.

Expanding access to effective parasiticides in shelters and rescues is a simple, high-impact strategy. These products may help reduce the risk of NWS infestation and are available for treatment of affected animals under current FDA approvals, conditional approvals, or emergency authorizations.

Apply protective ointment.

For animals other than cats, with an open wound, apply fly-repellent ointment (such as SWAT) around the wound to deter flies from laying eggs. **Never put permethrin, pyrethroids, or DEET on cats.** See more information on cats in the resource for Screwworms and Community Cats.

Screen every intake and transport.

Inspect all incoming animals for wounds or signs of infestation.

Review your fly control.

Now is a good time to assess how flies enter your facility and tighten any gaps. See resource: Fly Mitigation and Wound Management document for specific mitigation steps.

Transferring & Receiving Animals

Transport is safe and manageable with good protocols in place. Health certificate protocols for interstate transport exist to prevent disease spread. Stay vigilant on these examinations and make sure the veterinarians conducting them have access to these and other relevant resources.

If you're transferring animals, remember: your attention to this now keeps your transfer pipeline healthy and moving, keeps your transfer partnerships strong, and keeps your lifesaving operations on track. Connect with your shelter veterinarian so you're ready to certify animals quickly and check in with state regulatory agencies for the receiving state regularly to stay compliant with evolving requirements; your receiving partners may not be aware of any incoming requirements. Keeping your transfer pipeline moving and healthy is essential to lifesaving, and a little preparation now avoids disruption later.

If you're receiving animals from high-risk areas, inspect all animals immediately on arrival. If you find maggots, do not wait. Isolate the animal and call your vet. Even if your state has not yet issued formal guidance, build screwworm screening into your transfer intake process.

If You Operate Animal Control or Field Services in a High-Risk Area

Officers working in screwworm-affected areas should review current personal protective guidance at screwworm.gov before going into the field.

When dispatching calls from affected areas, ask the caller directly:
“Does the animal have any open wounds, sores, or areas that appear to be causing distress?”

If yes, that call should be treated as an elevated response, since larvae can hatch within 24 hours and time between the call and officer arrival can directly affect the animal's outcome. Be sure to consult your local Health Department regarding your specific area’s response time recommendations.

On scene, officers should examine ears, mouth, paws, skin folds, and genital areas for signs of infestation: foul-smelling wounds, active maggots, or a wound that is enlarging rather than healing. Stray animals are especially at risk.

Reporting Cases

The New World Screwworm is a federally reportable foreign animal disease. If suspected, do not transport the animal across jurisdictions. Contact your state animal health authority and USDA-APHIS immediately, and check screwworm.gov for the latest outbreak updates.

Resources

AVMA: New World Screwworm (clinical guidance, signs, treatment, reporting)
USDA APHIS: NWS Response Playbook
USDA APHIS: Standard Operating Procedure for Detection in Animals
FDA: Approved and Authorized Drugs for NWS
USAHA White Paper: NWS Preparedness, Prevention, and Response (March 2026)
CDC: New World Screwworm Outbreak

Questions? Reach the Best Friends Network team at **bfnetwork@bestfriends.org** or visit **bestfriends.org/network**.

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Fly Mitigation and Wound Management

A Layered Approach to Protecting Animals in Your Care

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With New World Screwworm confirmed in South Texas, shelters in southern states should approach fly mitigation in layers. The core risk is a female fly finding an open wound or moist body opening. The good news: there are simple strategies to prevent pets from being affected, and reducing the opportunity at every level is what keeps your animals safe.

New World Screwworm (NWS) is a parasitic fly whose larvae burrow into body openings of living animals including wounds, surgical incisions, exposed navels of newborn pets and sometimes orifices. They are highly treatable when caught early but can progress quickly and cause damage or even death if left untreated.

The six areas below are your priorities. Start with wound management; it has the highest impact.

1. Aggressive Wound Management (Start Here)

Conduct daily hands-on wound checks for every animal. Keep all wounds clean, dry, and covered whenever possible.

Prioritize daily monitoring for any animal with:

- Surgical incisions
- Bite wounds or hot spots
- Draining abscesses
- Ear injuries
- Skin infections
- Tick attachment wounds

Consider prioritizing daily monitoring for post-surgical animals, recent spay/neuter patients, puppies and kittens, seniors, and animals with skin disease or trauma recovery needs.

Expanding access to effective parasiticides in shelters and rescues is a simple, high-impact strategy. These products may help reduce the risk of NWS infestation and are available for treatment of affected animals under current FDA approvals, conditional approvals, or emergency authorizations. For more information on medications per species, see the NWS Need to Know resource.

2. Move High-Risk Animals Indoors

If your facility has any open-air housing, these animals should be your priority for indoor placement:

- Post-surgical and recent spay/neuter patients
- Neonatal kittens and puppies
- Senior pets
- Pets recovering from trauma or with skin conditions

3. Physical Fly Exclusion

For open-air or partially open spaces:

- Increase airflow with fans (flies avoid high-airflow areas)
- Install fine insect screening around recovery kennels
- Add screened shade structures
- Use fly curtains at kennel entrances
- Consider portable screened kennel pods for animals that need extra protection

4. Develop a Suspect Case Protocol

Every shelter near confirmed cases should have a written procedure before a case arrives. When suspicious larvae are found:

1. Isolate the animal immediately.
2. Photograph the wound.
3. Contact your shelter veterinarian.
4. Per USDA-APHIS protocol, any animal with a suspected or confirmed case must remain under the supervision of a USDA-accredited or state/federal veterinarian until screwworm is confirmed, treatment is complete, and the animal is declared free of infestation. **Euthanasia of an animal does not kill larvae.** Carcasses must be frozen or incinerated. Burial alone will not prevent further infestation. Treating the host animal with FDA approved medications is the most effective way to kill the larvae.
5. Administer medication per your vet's guidance. Check the FDA's current list of approved and emergency-authorized products.
6. Notify your State Animal Health Official.
7. Contact USDA APHIS. After-hours emergency line: (866) 536-7593.
8. Preserve larvae samples if instructed.
9. Document the animal's origin and movement history.

Having this written down and practiced in advance means your team doesn't have to figure it out in the moment.

5. Intake Screening

Add a visual wound inspection to every intake. Consider adding the following questions to your intake form for animals coming from high-risk areas:

Has this animal:

- Traveled from Mexico or recently crossed the border?
- Been imported or found near a port of entry?
- Had recent wounds or been treated for maggots?
- Been transported from Texas, New Mexico, or a southern state?

6. Daily Surveillance

Train all staff and volunteers to report the following immediately, rather than waiting for the next vet check:

- Enlarging or foul-smelling wounds
- Bloody wound drainage
- Unexplained pain or restlessness

- Head shaking or excessive licking
- Visible larvae

The earlier a potential case is caught, the better the outcome for the animal. Early detection is the difference between a treatable situation and a life-threatening one.

Resources

AVMA: New World Screwworm
USDA APHIS NWS Response Playbook
USDA APHIS: SOP for Detection in Animals
FDA: Approved and Authorized Drugs for NWS

Questions? Reach the Best Friends Network team at **bfnetwork@bestfriends.org** or visit **bestfriends.org/network**.

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New World Screwworm and Community Cats

Simple Protocols to Help Protect Community Cats

Last Updated: June 26, 2026

Use this guide to help protect your community's cat population from New World Screwworm (*Cochliomyia hominivorax*) with a few straightforward adjustments to your existing protocols.

New World Screwworm (NWS) is a parasitic fly whose larvae burrow into body openings of living animals including wounds, surgical incisions, exposed navels of newborn pets and sometimes orifices. They are highly treatable when caught early but can progress quickly and cause damage or even death if left untreated.

The good news: New World Screwworm (NWS) is preventable and highly treatable, and if your area does not have active confirmed NWS cases, your cats are not currently at risk. Keep this guide on hand so you're prepared and confident if cases are ever confirmed in your area.

When NWS is active in a region, warm-blooded outdoor animals with open wounds are the primary concern. With simple additions to your surgical protocol, wound monitoring and prompt care, your community cats can stay safe and healthy. This guide walks you through easy protocol adjustments to help keep them protected.

A few important things to know as you plan:

- NWS is federally reportable, so your local veterinary and wildlife networks will have up-to-date information on active cases.
- Treatment and drug authorizations are updated frequently — your veterinarian is your best resource for confirming current approved options before use.

Why This Matters

Unlike common maggots, which feed on dead tissue, New World Screwworm larvae feed on *living* tissue in warm-blooded animals — they burrow into a fresh wound, enlarge it, and attract more flies, so an infestation can become fatal within days if left untreated. However, it is highly treatable when caught early.

Wounds such as scrapes, bites, surgical incisions or ear-tips are at risk for infestation in areas where the NWS fly is active. Risk is highest in or near areas with confirmed cases during warm months; screwworm flies are largely inactive in cool weather.

Widely accessible flea and tick medications that you may already have on hand can help prevent NWS, so expensive protocol revisions are not warranted in most situations.

Treatment at Surgery

Give a systemic isoxazoline while the cat is anesthetized.

For community cats, their surgical appointment is your opportunity to provide them with month-long protection from NWS. A systemic isoxazoline circulates in the cat's tissue and kills larvae that try to feed there.

Choose a product authorized for cats.
Credelio CAT (oral lotilaner) and **NexGard COMBO** (topical esafoxolaner) carry FDA emergency use authorizations for screwworm in cats. The month-long efficacy of these products protects cats while their incision heals and for weeks afterwards. The topical is also very practical for TNVR cats when applied while the cat is anesthetized. Topical Bravecto (fluralaner) lasts longer but is **extra-label** for screwworm and Nitenpyram (Capstar) works rapidly, but its duration of action is only about a day.

Product efficacy.
As with fleas, Isoxazolines kill larvae that feed on the treated cat. They do not repel flies or stop eggs from being laid, but the drug limits how far an infestation progresses.

Considerations for kittens and nursing queens.
Check label minimums for weight and age before dosing juveniles, and discuss pregnancy and lactation guidance with your veterinarian; these products are typically extra label for use in very young kittens and nursing moms.

Fly Repellents — What Not to Use

Never put permethrin, pyrethroids, or DEET on a cat.
Cats cannot metabolize these compounds, and exposure can cause severe, potentially fatal neurologic toxicity. This includes most products marketed as fly repellents.

Avoid livestock and equine products.
Fly sprays and the screwworm wound sprays and ointments authorized for cattle, horses, and other species are not authorized for cats.

Systemic isoxazoline and careful wound management are the safe and effective methods to protect cats; cat-safe topical fly repellents are not available.

Surgery, Wounds, and Release

Surgical closure.
A fully closed, non-oozing incision is important as blood and discharge attract egg-laying flies. Surgical technique should include a secure intradermal closure with good hemostasis. Thoroughly clean residual blood from the cat prior to discharge. Apply sterile tissue adhesive as a protective layer when appropriate for the specific surgical procedure.

Ear tip.
Ensure complete hemostasis and clean edges before the cat is returned. Electrocautery is recommended over chemical cautery, and battery-operated units are inexpensive and available from veterinary distributors. *Avoid the use of electrocautery when oxygen is being delivered via a face mask*.

Post-operative cleaning.

Wipe away any blood or discharge and confirm the incision and ear-tip are clotted and dry before release or discharge.

Considerations for areas with confirmed cases.

In high-risk areas with confirmed cases, during fly season, weigh the potential benefit of holding cats for a brief period (24–48 hours) against the stress of confining unsocialized cats and your holding capacity. It may also be considered for cats with larger incisions (e.g., procedures other than routine spay/neuter). *This is a risk-based decision and is likely unnecessary except in the highest risk areas*.

Euthanizing the host animal does not kill larvae. A euthanized animal with suspected or confirmed NWS is still a biosecurity hazard until the carcass is frozen or incinerated.

Caretakers and Reporting

Alert colony caretakers to watch community cats for enlarging, foul, or maggot-bearing wounds and to report them immediately. New World Screwworm is reportable: in Texas call the Texas Animal Health Commission at **1-800-550-8242**; in New Mexico call the New Mexico Livestock Board at **505-841-6161** (after-hours AgroGuard 1-800-525-2782).

A Note on the Evidence

Expanding access to effective parasiticides in shelters and rescues is a simple, high-impact strategy. These products may help reduce the risk of NWS infestation and are available for treatment of affected animals under current FDA approvals, conditional approvals, or emergency authorizations. For more information on medications per species, see the NWS Need to Know resource.

Resources

FDA: New World Screwworm — Information for Veterinarians
AVMA: New World Screwworm
USDA APHIS: Stop Screwworm
Texas A&M AgriLife: Companion Animal Care in the Face of the NWS Threat
Texas A&M Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences: Digging Deeper: How to Protect Pets from the New World Screwworm
New Mexico: ScrewwormNM.org

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Staff and Volunteer Training Guide

Recognizing and Responding to New World Screwworm

Last Updated: June 26 2026

New World Screwworm (NWS) is a parasitic fly whose larvae burrow into body openings of living animals including wounds, surgical incisions, exposed navels of newborn pets and sometimes orifices. They are highly treatable when caught early but can progress quickly and cause damage or even death if left untreated.

You don't need to be a veterinarian to play a critical role in protecting the animals in your shelter. You just need to know what to look for and what to do when you see it.

Part 1: Background

New World Screwworm (*Cochliomyia hominivorax*) is a fly whose larvae burrow into the living tissue of animals through open wounds or moist body openings. Unlike most flies, these larvae feed on healthy tissue and cause damage that can worsen rapidly.

The pest was eliminated from the U.S. in 1966 but was confirmed in South Texas on June 3, 2026. While southern U.S. state shelters face the highest immediate risk, the fly's seasonal range can extend as far north as Canada. The AVMA has confirmed that travel makes it possible for NWS to be introduced into any U.S. state. Shelters receiving transfer animals from the South should also be on alert.

The good news: it is treatable when caught early. Your eyes and hands are one of the most powerful tools your shelter has right now.

Part 2: What You're Looking For

During your daily interactions with animals, watch and feel for any of the following:

Signs a wound may be infested:

- The wound looks bigger than it did yesterday
- There is a foul or unusual smell
- You see bloody or unusual drainage
- The animal seems to be in more pain than expected or is unusually restless
- The animal is shaking its head or licking obsessively at a spot
- You see small, pale larvae (maggots) moving in or near a wound

Wound types that are highest risk:

- Surgical incisions (including spay/neuter wounds)
- Bite wounds or puncture wounds
- Hot spots
- Ear wounds or infections
- Tick attachment sites
- Draining skin lesions

- Any open or moist wound

How can someone "test" for screwworms?
Screwworms are detected through a hands-on nose to tail inspection of animals — checking all wounds, orifices (ears, nose, mouth, genitals), skin folds, and moist areas for eggs, larvae, unusual odor, or tissue damage. No special equipment is needed. If larvae are found or strongly suspected, isolate the animal to facilitate the observation of the larvae if they fall to the ground. Collect a sample to submit to a USDA-approved lab for species confirmation. Lab results typically take 1–5 business days.

Part 3: What to Do If You Find Something

1. Stay calm. Finding a suspected case is not a crisis if you act quickly.
2. Do not touch or remove larvae. Leave the wound as-is until a vet or vet tech can assess it.
3. Isolate the animal. Move it away from other animals immediately. Use gloves.
4. Report it right away. Tell your supervisor and shelter veterinarian as soon as possible. Do not wait until end of shift.
5. Document what you saw. Note the animal's ID, wound location and appearance, and when you noticed the change. Take a photo if your shelter's protocols allow.
6. Follow your shelter's screwworm SOP. If you're not sure where it is, ask your supervisor now, before you need it.

Note: if a case is confirmed, USDA-APHIS protocol requires the animal to be placed under a hold order and supervised by a USDA-accredited or state veterinarian until treatment is complete and the animal is declared free of infestation.

Part 4: Daily Prevention Habits

- Do a hands-on wound check during every feeding or cleaning round. Look at surgical sites, ears, and anywhere that could collect moisture.
- Report any new or changing wounds to your supervisor immediately, even if you're not sure it's significant.
- Keep wounds covered and dry when practical. If a bandage is wet, dirty, or has come loose, report it.
- Never move an animal with an open wound to an outdoor or open-air area without checking with a vet or supervisor first.
- If you are handling intakes from Mexico, high-risk communities, or animals with unknown history, give wound checks extra attention.

Part 5: Intake Screening

When checking in a new animal, look for these on the intake form or ask directly:

- Has this animal been in Mexico or near the border recently?
- Are there any known wounds or injuries?
- Has the animal been treated for maggots or wound infestation?
- Has this animal been transported from Texas, New Mexico, or anywhere in the South recently?

Do a head-to-tail visual inspection on every intake. If you see anything concerning, flag it before the animal is housed with other animals.

Part 6: Protecting Yourself

New World Screwworm primarily affects warm-blooded animals, not humans, but good hygiene matters. Wash your hands thoroughly after handling any animal with wounds. Wear gloves when examining wounds or handling wound dressings.

Quick Reference

Report immediately if you see: enlarging or foul-smelling wound, bloody drainage, visible larvae, unusual pain or restlessness, head shaking or obsessive licking.

Always: Report to supervisor and vet right away. Document what you saw. Follow your shelter's current SOP.

Never: Never remove larvae yourself. Do not wait until the end of shift to report. Never move a suspected animal to outdoor housing without vet or staff leadership approval.

A Note on the Evidence

Expanding access to effective parasiticides in shelters and rescues is a simple, high-impact strategy. These products may help reduce the risk of NWS infestation and are available for treatment of affected animals under current FDA approvals, conditional approvals, or emergency authorizations. For more information on medications per species, see the NWS Need to Know resource.

Resources

AVMA: New World Screwworm
USDA APHIS: SOP for Detection in Animals

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