New World Screwworm

NWS Adult. Photo credit: Judy Gallagher

The US has been researching and battling screwworm infestations since the 1930s, eradicating it in several states over several decades.

In the 1970s, the US partnered with Mexico in a battle against the screwworm, and eventually declared it eradicated in both countries.

The New World screwworm officially returned to Mexico in 2024 and the US in 2026.

NWS larvae. Photo credit: Sohath Yusseff-Vanegas, USDA Agricultural Research Service

ABOUT

New World Screwworms are obligate parasites of all warm-blooded animals. They cause serious injury and death. Unlike typical fly larvae that feed on necrotic tissue, screwworm larvae feed on live tissue.

Screwworm flies target and lay eggs in wounds, mucus membranes, and orifices including eyes, nose, genitalia. Flies can infest wounds as small as a tick bite.

Females can lay 2,800 eggs in 10-30 days.
Eggs hatch within 12-24 hours.

The larvae burrow and feed, which attracts more flies that lay eggs. This process continues until the animal dies in 5-10 days.

Larvae crawl out of the wound, burrow in soil to pupate and become adults, emerging to mate after 3-5 days.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

- Wounds that won't heal
- Maggots on pets
- Egg masses on wounds
- Pets licking or biting at wounds
- Excessive licking or biting anywhere
- Swelling, discharge, or foul odor from wounds, mucus membranes, or orifices
- Head shaking
- Unusual behavior/hiding or isolating
- Restlessness
- Depression/lethargy
- Lack of appetite

Note: Infested animals are in immense pain caused by screwworms, which is why they display behavior changes and decreased appetite.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PROTECT YOUR PETS

- Check pets regularly for new wounds
- Clean & protect wounds immediately
- Have wounds checked by a veterinarian
- Keep pet areas including kennels, beds, & doghouses clean
- Keep feces picked up
- Keep trash bagged, contained, & covered
- Keep pets protected from parasites with preventives
- For pets with allergies, watch for hot spots & talk with your veterinarian about treatment
- Keep pets away from livestock
- Before moving/traveling with pets, consult with your veterinarian
- Know the international regulations before transporting pets in or out of country

IDENTIFICATION

Photo courtesy of USDA

New World screwworm flies are about the same size as a typical housefly. They have orange eyes, blue/green metallic bodies, and three dark stripes on their backs.

Photo courtesy of USDA

If you suspect your pet has been infected, contact your veterinarian immediately.
If you see evidence of flies, eggs, maggots on an animal wound, you can report it to a veterinarian or to a state animal health official.

RESOURCES:

For updated information, visit the following sites:

screwwormnm.org

screwworm.gov

Infested zone map:

https://nmsu.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/lookup/index.html?appid=c77423a2c4a9471190063fedfdf76d53

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