

NEW WORLD SCREWORM

How to Identify & Protect Your Animals



JULY 2026

New World screwworm (NWS) is a parasitic fly whose larvae (maggots) feed exclusively on the **living tissue** of warm-blooded animals. Infestations cause severe wounds in animals and humans. Screwworm is not a food safety concern, but untreated cases can kill an animal within 7-10 days.

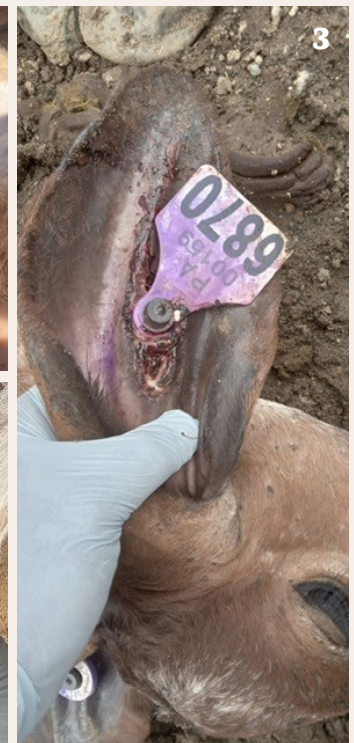
New World screwworm is reportable. To prevent NWS, clean, treat and cover any wounds immediately. Screwworm is a highly preventable and treatable condition using approved products and diligent animal care. Work with your veterinarian to discuss enhanced management practices and effective screwworm treatments. Early detection on the farm through daily monitoring of livestock and reporting suspicious wounds is key to preventing an infestation which would harm herd health and disrupt dairy operations.

Identification: What to Look For

Unlike typical blowflies or housefly maggots that feed on dead tissue or necrotic wounds, screwworms target fresh, living wounds.

Clinical Signs in the Herd

- **The "Pocket" Wound:** NWS flies lay egg masses at the edge of fresh wounds or mucous membranes/body openings (e.g., fresh brands, dehorning sites, heel warts, torn ears, or the navels of newborn calves, genitalia). The larvae burrow deep vertically into the flesh, creating a pocket-like cavity rather than feeding on the surface.
 - Open wounds like small tears, scratches, chapped, or frostbitten teats are especially attractive to screwworm flies.
- **Foul Odor & Discharge:** Infested wounds produce a highly distinct, reddish-brown, foul-smelling discharge.
- **Animal Behavior:** Affected cattle will appear extremely uncomfortable, restless, depressed, and isolated from the herd. They will constantly lick or bite at the wound site.

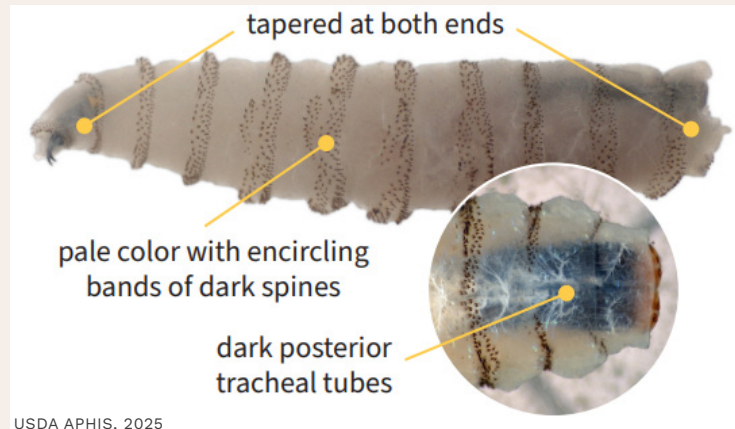


1 Texas Animal Health Commission, 2026
2 Texas Animal Health Commission, 2026
3 USDA APHIS, 2026

Identification: What to Look For

Physical Identification

- **The Larvae (Maggots):** Look closely at the larvae inside the wound cavity. They are cylindrical, tapered at both ends, and feature prominent rings of dark spines around their segments that resemble a wood screw. A key diagnostic feature is the **two dark, parallel breathing tubes (tracheae)** visible through the skin on the rear third of their bodies. When fully mature, these flesh-eating maggots can grow up to 17 mm (2/3 of an inch) long.



- **The Adult Fly:** Roughly twice the size of a common housefly (about 8 to 10 mm; 5/16 to 13/32 inches long), it features a metallic dark blue or blue-green thorax with **three dark longitudinal stripes on its back** (the center stripe is shorter). They have prominent, large orange-to-reddish eyes and a yellowish-orange face.



Adult NWS Fly. Source: Borderlands Research Institute - Sul Ross State University / New World Screwworm: Historical Impacts and Current Threats

REMINDER

Official laboratory confirmation is completely free, and state/federal teams prefer responding to false alarms over risking a delayed NWS detection.

Immediate Actions to Take

If you find a suspicious wound or larvae that match this description, treat it as a biosecurity emergency:

- 1. Isolate the Animal:** Immediately move the suspected animal(s) to a secure, enclosed, or concrete-floored holding pen to prevent mature larvae from dropping off into the soil to pupate.
- 2. Contact your veterinarian immediately if you suspect a screwworm infestation:** Your veterinarian will need to collect samples to submit for official identification as well as provide advice for treating your animal and minimizing spread. If a veterinarian is not available, producers can collect samples but will need to contact the state veterinarian or APHIS veterinarian for your area regarding proper shipping to an approved laboratory.
- 3. Hold Livestock Movement:** Do not move, ship, or transfer any cattle off the operation until animal health officials clear the herd.

Who to Contact for Confirmation

It is important to report suspected cases immediately.

- 1. Your Herd Veterinarian:** Contact them immediately. They can perform an initial professional evaluation, coordinate directly with state officials and provide guidance for selecting the correct NWS treatment for your animal(s).
- 2. State Veterinarian / State Department of Agriculture:** Every state has a designated State Veterinarian's office equipped to handle reportable foreign animal diseases. Find your state veterinarian [here](#).
- 3. USDA APHIS Area Veterinary Services:** Call your local USDA APHIS Veterinary Services [office](#). Alternatively, you can reach the main federal reporting line at **1-866-536-7593**.