

Equine Herpesvirus

Two cases of the neurologic form of the Equine Herpesvirus have been confirmed in Lake County, IL. At this time, the identified farm is under quarantine as veterinarians work to determine the traffic patterns of all potentially exposed horses.

We have received many emails and phone calls from concerned owners about information on this virus and ways to protect horses from this disease and would like to take a moment to provide some information.



Let's start with some basic information about the Equine Herpesvirus:

Equine herpesviruses are found in horse populations worldwide. There are several types of the equine herpesvirus (EHV 1, EHV 2, EHV 3, EHV 4, EHV 5). EHV 1 and EHV 4 are the most common forms to cause clinical disease in horses. EHV-1 can cause respiratory disease, abortion, or neurologic disease (with or without respiratory signs). EHV-4 can cause respiratory disease mainly but can occasionally cause abortion or neurologic disease as well.

The virus is typically transmitted through inhalation of aerosolized secretions (often from snorting, coughing, or sneezing). However, direct transmission can occur through contact with an aborted fetus or fetal membranes. Shedding of the virus typically occurs for 7 to 10 days and the virus can be shed even after resolution of clinical signs – hence the reason for lengthy quarantine times even after resolution of clinical signs. Once the virus is shed into the environment, it can persist for weeks without proper sanitation methods.

Clinical signs in adult horses include fever, coughing, anorexia, depression, nasal coughing, conjunctivitis, abortion, ataxia, urine dribbling, loss of coordination in the hind limbs, and recumbency. Clinical signs in foals that are infected in utero include weakness from birth, generalized malaise, and often death within several days. If you have any concerns about your horse's health, you should contact your veterinarian immediately.

How you can take steps to help protect your horse from this disease:

Vaccination

Currently, there are no vaccines labeled for protection against the myeloencephalitic form of EHV-1 infection. EHV vaccines, however, assist in limiting the spread of outbreaks of the neurologic form by limiting the overall shedding of the virus. For this reason, vaccinating in the face of an outbreak is suggested. The vaccines with the greatest ability to limit nasal shedding include the inactivated vaccines licensed for control of abortion (Pneumabort-K and Prodigy), a modified live vaccine (Rhinomune) and an inactivated vaccine, (Calvenza). Vaccinations should be discussed with your veterinarian and given based on risk of exposure.

Biosecurity

In addition, proper biosecurity measures are key to prevention and limiting spread of EHV or any disease. Below are several important ways to help keep your horse and farm safe:

- Isolate of new horses or those returning from a populated show.
- Practice proper hygiene – washing of hands, changing of clothes – after visiting different barns.
- Practice proper hygiene – wash hands, clean tack and grooming equipment – with each individual horse.

During this outbreak, it is important to stay calm and practice responsible horse ownership. Continue to monitor your horse and contact your veterinarian with any questions or concerns. When travelling to shows, clinics, trails, or other events that bring many different populations of horses together it is important to practice proper hygiene, be up to date on all vaccinations, and limit exposure to other visibly ill horses. Show season and beautiful weather is just around the corner. With the proper precautions you and your four-legged friend can be prepared and protected to enjoy both.

Sincerely

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