

# Disease Notification



Agriculture, Food  
and Rural Initiatives

Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer

October 19, 2011

Subject: Equine herpesvirus myeloencephalopathy (EHM) exposure in Manitoba

To: Manitoba horse owners and veterinarians

This letter is to notify you of recent EHM exposure to horses traveling to Manitoba equine events. An out of province horse facility is reported to have had three horses that exhibited clinical signs consistent with EHM, beginning on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011. Diagnostic testing on one of the horses was positive for equine herpes virus 1 (EHV1), although the specific strain was not identified. Two of the three horses have succumbed to the disease. The owner of the facility has been advised by their veterinarian to quarantine all horses on the facility for a minimum of 6 weeks. While none of the affected horses were reported to have been in Manitoba, other horses from the facility had traveled to a horse show in Brandon during same time frame. A horse at a separate out of province facility had direct contact with the horses from the first facility that traveled to Brandon. This horse is now exhibiting respiratory signs consistent with EHV1, although no diagnostic confirmation has occurred.

EHV1 is a common very contagious virus in horse populations that causes respiratory disease, abortion outbreaks and rarely the neurologic disease known as EHM. Over the past several years, reported cases of EVH1, especially EHM, have been on the rise across North America. Additionally there have been several outbreaks of EHM linked to horse shows and large equine facilities. A new strain of the virus, called neurotropic Equine herpes Virus 1(nEHV1) has been associated with this emerging disease. The latest reported outbreak in western Canada occurred in May of this year. No new cases from that outbreak have been identified since early June.

To protect their horses Manitoba horse owners should use basic biosecurity precautions:

- Do not share equipment, tack, feed buckets, water buckets or trailers.
- If attending shows or events, use precautions to limit direct contact between horses from different locations. Owners may also want to consider isolating horses returning from shows or new introductions from the rest of the horses at their home premises.
- When handling multiple horses wash or disinfect hands between horses.
- Use clean foot ware and clothing when moving between horse farms or between groups of horses: Horse owners are advised to provide clean foot ware and coveralls to all visitors that come in direct contact with horses on their premises.
- Vaccinate horses against the common infectious diseases, including EHV1. There are no vaccines for nEHV1. However, vaccinations help keep horses healthy by preventing other infectious diseases.
- Monitor horses closely for any signs of fever, loss of appetite, nasal discharge, depression or weakness. Owners should be particularly concerned about the 14 day period after horses return from shows. Contact a veterinarian immediately if a horse shows significant signs of illness.
- Isolate sick horses from other horses and allow no direct contact. If a horse becomes sick at a show or event, remove the horse immediately and notify the event organizers.

- If handling sick horses, use disposable gloves and immediately change clothing and foot ware afterwards.
- Clean and disinfect all equipment and environment exposed to sick horses (stalls, trailers, tack, feeding equipment, water buckets). Disinfectants, such as bleach are not effective unless a thorough cleaning has occurred first.

Horse owners are encouraged to contact their veterinarians to discuss the level of risk, exposure and adequate biosecurity, including vaccination, for their own horses and facilities.

Veterinarians are encouraged to report suspect cases to the CVO. Veterinarians are also encouraged to submit samples from any horses that exhibit clinical signs consistent Equine Herpes Virus infection. Details for the correct sample type and submission requirements can be obtained from Veterinary Diagnostic Services at 945-8220.

Overall, it is important to note that no affected horses have been reported in Manitoba to date. The Chief Veterinary Office will work closely with Manitoba veterinarians to monitor the situation. Horse owners are strongly encouraged to take prudent and rational precautions to protect their horses. If you have any questions or concerns, **please contact the CVO at 945-7663 or Dr. Glen Duizer 945-4174**

Sincerely,

Wayne Lees, DVM MSc  
Chief Veterinary Officer  
Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives  
545 University Crescent, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3T 5S6