

Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA)

DISEASE CONTROL FOR “SWAMP FEVER” OR “HORSE MALARIA”

Commonly known as “Swamp Fever” or “Horse Malaria”, EIA is caused by a virus in horses that can lead to destruction of platelets, red blood cells, and inflammation in many of the organs in the horse’s body. The virus invades the white blood cells (monocytes and macrophages) and causes a lifelong infection within the spleen, liver, and other tissues. The virus is spread from horse to horse by biting, blood sucking flies such as the horsefly and deerfly. The virus can also be passed from dam to foal through the placenta, through natural breeding as a venereal disease, and by any transfer of blood from an infected horse to an uninfected such as the use of dirty needles or other equipment.

The clinical signs in a horse vary and may be an acute form of the disease or a more chronic form. The acute form can be seen as a sudden high fever, lethargy, anemia, and low blood platelets. The chronic form presents as an intermittent fever, weight loss, edema in the legs and lower abdomen, and anemia. Initially the horse’s immune system may be able to stop the virus and the horse will go through periods of no symptoms but can still spread the virus. These animals serve as inapparent carriers. The horse will then have reoccurring episodes that can lead to chronic debilitation.

There is no treatment or vaccination for this virus. Control of the disease is through testing of horses to identify carriers of the virus. The Coggins test was developed in 1970 and is used as the standard diagnostic test to detect antibodies in the blood against the virus. This testing is part of a Federal and State program to control this disease. The Coggins test is commonly required when moving horses within and among States. The test requires a blood sample to be taken by an accredited veterinarian and the proper paperwork submitted to a licensed laboratory that performs the test. It is recommended to have your horse tested yearly starting at 6 months of age. Any horses that are tested positive must be either euthanized or quarantined a safe distance from other horses.

Here are things that horse owners can do to help control spread of this disease according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_health/content/printable_version/fs_equine_infectious_anemia.pdf

- Use disposable syringes and needles. Follow the rule of one horse-one needle.
- Clean and sterilize all instruments thoroughly after each use.
- Keep stables and immediate facilities clean and sanitary. Remove manure and debris promptly, and ensure that the area is well drained.
- Implement insect controls. Avoid habitats favorable to insect survival.
- Do not intermingle infected and healthy animals. Do not breed EIAV-positive horses.
- Isolate all new horses, mules, and asses brought to the premises until they have been tested for EIA.
- Obtain the required certification of negative EIA test status for horse shows, county fairs, race-tracks, and other places where many animals are brought together.
- Abide by State laws that govern EIA. The major regulatory actions to control EIA are carried out by the States. Contact your veterinarian or your State veterinarian for testing requirements in your State.