



EQUINE HERPES VIRUS (EHV)

What is EHV?

There are a number of strains of Equine Herpes Virus (EHV) that can be found in horses; however the strains of most concern are EHV1 and EHV4. Both EHV1 and EHV4 are widespread, with many horses having the virus but not showing clinical signs.

EHV1 usually causes respiratory disease in young horses, abortion in pregnant mares and neurological disease leading to paralysis.

EHV4 tends to only cause low grade respiratory disease, but has been known to cause abortion.

Why are there outbreaks?

As with lots of other viruses, EHV can become latent and reside in the cells of the horse. Periodically, the virus will reactivate (usually in times of stress - eg travel or illness) and multiply. This multiplication can lead to clinical signs of disease.

How is the virus spread?

The virus is spread in aerosolised droplets which are then inhaled or ingested by other horses. EHV can also be spread by people or equipment that have had contact with an infected horse. In abortion cases, it is important to remember that contact with the aborted foetus, membranes and placenta can lead to spread of EHV.

Clinical signs

There are three main forms of EHV that may be seen:

- Respiratory disease - varying from mild to severe.
- Abortion (usually in the last 3 months of pregnancy).
- Neurological disease which can ultimately lead to paralysis.

The early signs you may observe in your horse may include:

- High temperature (>38.5°C)
- Inappetance
- Lethargy
- Coughing
- Nasal discharge

Diagnosis of EHV

- Nasopharyngeal swabs and a blood sample can be used to detect EHV.
- If, unfortunately, an affected horse dies or is euthanased, a full post mortem will confirm the diagnosis of EHV.
- In the case of abortion, ideally the whole foetus, membranes and placenta should be sent for testing.

Control of EHV

- It is of vital importance that any suspected EHV cases are immediately isolated. All horses who have had contact with a suspected case (even those that have left the yard) should be treated as 'in contact' horses. Movement on/off the yard must immediately stop.
- Any cases who have aborted or have shown neurological signs should be isolated and handled by different staff. All abortion material should be kept for your Vet but other horses must not come into contact with the affected horse or abortion material.
- All bedding should be disinfected and disposed of, and all stables should be thoroughly disinfected.
- 'In contact' horses should be carefully monitored for any clinical signs. If they begin to show any symptoms they should be isolated.

If EHV is confirmed on the yard, restrictions will remain in place for a minimum of 28 days. A mare that has aborted should be isolated away from other pregnant mares for 56 days after abortion. Blood testing at 7-14 day intervals is important to establish when the virus stops spreading through the yard.

EHV Vaccines

- EHV vaccines are available that can provide some protection however no vaccine can provide complete protection, making good hygiene and biosecurity of paramount importance.
- It is recommended that all horses on a stud are vaccinated against EHV. This involves a primary vaccination course (4-6 weeks apart) followed by boosters at 6 monthly intervals. Pregnant mares should have additional boosters at 5, 7 and 9 months of gestation.
- The vaccine is very safe, however we recommend only healthy horses should receive vaccines for EHV and the vaccine should NOT be used in the face of an outbreak. The reason is that vaccinating a horse who is already incubating the virus can lead to the horse suffering more severe signs of EHV. It is best to discuss with your vet what is appropriate for your horse or yard.

Keeping Your Horse Safe

Quarantine any new arrivals onto your yard for 2 - 3 weeks. Quarantine should mean physical separation from other horses, ideally 10-20m. Ideally separate people should see to the quarantined horses but if this is not possible they should be done last and the people then change and disinfect.

- Avoid using communal water sources. Fill buckets from the tap and don't mix water/ feed bowls.
- Don't share equipment between horses, e.g. tack, rugs, grooming kit. If you need to share equipment ensure it has been disinfected first.
- Regularly disinfect stables, vehicles and equipment. Use appropriate disinfectants at the correct concentration, removing organic matter first.
- Keep yourself to yourself at competitions/ training, ie. Don't allow nose to nose contact with horses from other yards.
- Monitor all horses for signs of illness e.g. rectal temperatures (should be <38.5°C) daily. Any horses showing any signs of illness should be isolated and a Vet called.
- Do not take your horse to an event if he/ she has been unwell.
- Wash your hands or use hand gels in between horses.
- Keep pregnant mares separately in small groups, away from young stock and other horses.
- Control access for vehicles and visitors to your yard and ensure your perimeter fencing is secure.
- Keep records of horse movements (on and off the yard), so that contacts can be traced in the event of an outbreak.

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT

<http://codes.hblb.org.uk/index.php/page/72>

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT OUR EQUINE VETS IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS OR QUESTIONS ABOUT EQUINE HERPES VIRUS.

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