

Equine Herpesvirus Fact Sheet

Equine Herpesvirus (EHV) infections are extremely common in the equine population. There are 4 different types of Equine Herpesvirus. EHV-1 typically can cause abortion, neurologic disease, respiratory illness or fatal neonatal illness. EHV-2 is a factor in foal respiratory disease. EHV-3 causes venereal disease in horses and EHV-4 is a major cause of respiratory disease in horses. In 2005 and 2006 there have been numerous outbreaks of Equine Herpesvirus type-1 (EHV-1). These disease outbreaks have occurred at racetracks, training farms, and private farms in Kentucky, Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, and Michigan. The alarming fact is these outbreaks are due to a new strain of EHV-1. A genetic mutation has produced the new strain, which is a neuropathogenic form of EHV-1. This new strain is characterized by high morbidity, high case fatality rate, and has a unique ability to overwhelm a horse's immune system even in vaccinated animals.

The Oklahoma Department of Agriculture has prepared this fact sheet to answer an abundance of misinformation and rumors circulating about the presence of Equine Herpesvirus-1 in Oklahoma. The Department has been involved in testing a few horses with clinical disease that possibly was related to the EHV-1 outbreaks previously mentioned. Testing is complete and there is NO evidence to suggest the presence in Oklahoma of the neuropathogenic strain of EHV-1. The consensus among equine health professionals suggests you consult your veterinarian for assistance in maintaining a current vaccination program, which should include Equine Herpesvirus.

An effective defense against this or any contagious disease is prevention by using good biosecurity practices. Limit traffic and control visitors access to the farm that could be exposed to infectious agents elsewhere. Newly acquired animals or animals that have traveled and commingled with others of unknown disease status should be isolated and observed for 14-21 days for signs of disease before being introduced to the herd. Personnel returning from exposure to another farm should change clothes or coveralls, wash hands with soap and water, and disinfect shoes before contacting animals again. Shoes can be cleaned and disinfected using a mixture of three parts bleach to two parts water. Clean and disinfect equipment such as feed buckets, water buckets, bridles, grooming equipment, etc. before sharing between horses. Vehicle tires and trailer compartments can be cleaned and disinfected using a spray mixture consisting of one part bleach to ten parts water.