



EQUINE HERPES VIRUS ALERT

Currently there is a Europe-wide alert of increased risk of severe respiratory and neurological disease associated with Equine Herpes Virus (EHV-1) which originated at an international showjumping event in Valencia, Spain. Although horses with the neurological form of the disease can recover with treatment, many affected animals may die or require euthanasia.

Cases of Equine Herpes Virus associated with the outbreak in Spain have now been confirmed in France, Switzerland and Belgium and Qatar. So far there have been no reported cases associated with the Spanish outbreak in the UK, although showjumpers returning from Spain have entered the country.

Equine Herpes Virus is not a notifiable disease nationally but it is notifiable to the HPA under the rules of polo, as even a small outbreak in polo ponies could have a devastating effect on the polo season.

Signs to look out for

- A high temperature
- Nasal discharge
- A dry cough
- Loss of appetite
- Reduced performance
- Lethargy/depression

Horses with the neurological form of the disease are unable to pass urine or droppings, show poor limb coordination (the hindlimbs are more usually affected) and in severe cases are unable to stand. Pregnant mares can suddenly and unexpectedly miscarry their unborn foal.

Biosecurity measures

Polo ponies from unknown premises, or premises where there may have been mixing of horses over the winter, coming into polo yards now to prepare for the season should be isolated from other polo ponies for 10 days and be monitored closely for any of the signs listed above. Daily rectal temperatures should be taken (the normal temperature range of a healthy adult horse at rest is between 37.0 and 38.0 degrees centigrade).

If you suspect a polo pony of having Equine Herpes Virus or have a pregnant mare that miscarries, you should call your vet immediately and notify the HPA.

HPA advice on EHV vaccination:

- Vaccination against EHV-1 is recommended in so much as it decreases nasal shedding of the virus if a vaccinated horse does become infected. Therefore, vaccination decreases the total amount of virus in the environment which in turn reduces the likelihood that other horses become infected.

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- However, for vaccinations to be effective all horses on a premises should be vaccinated, and a primary course of two doses 4 – 6 weeks apart followed by boosters every 6 months is required. A single vaccination is unlikely to provide any significant benefit.
- No EHV-1 vaccine is licensed for use to prevent the neurological form of the disease and vaccination has not specifically been demonstrated to reduce the risk of neurological signs. However, vaccination of the wider population will reduce the spread of the virus and therefore reduce the chances of the neurological form of the disease occurring.
- Vaccination of horses known or suspected to have recently been in contact with EHV-1 is not recommended as there is evidence to suggest it may increase the risk of them developing the neurological form of the disease.

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