

Equine Infectious Anemia in Yukon

Winter 2018
Animal Health Program

Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA)

Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) or swamp fever, is an incurable blood disease of horses and other equids. It is spread by biting insects and contaminated equipment.

EIA is known to occur in Yukon and in other provinces where Yukon horses could be exposed to the virus. A Coggins test from a blood sample is the only way to know whether a horse is infected.

What you can do to avoid EIA

A horse with EIA cannot be cured and carries the virus for life. There is no vaccine. Careful management is the only way to reduce the risk that your horse will be exposed. To avoid EIA in your horses, you need to:

- Require proof of a negative Coggins test (i.e., exposure to the virus is not detected) for any horse that you add to your herd.
- Only breed or use semen for AI from horses that have tested negative for EIA.
- Quarantine new horses for at least 45 days before adding them to your herd. Watch for increased temperature, loss of appetite, depression, weakness or any other signs of illness. Consult your veterinarian for advice if any illness is suspected.
- Use disposable needles and syringes to give vaccines or medications. Never use a needle on more than one horse.
- Sterilize dental tools after use and before using them on another horse.
- Keep your horses at least 200 metres away from any horse of unknown EIA status. Biting insects are unlikely to carry live virus from one horse to another that is 200 metres away. Avoid any contact between your horses that are known to be EIA negative and any horses of unknown status.
- Discourage flies and biting insects by keeping pastures and stable areas clean and ensuring standing water sources are changed regularly. While insect repellants may be useful, it is not possible to completely control insect pests.



Contact

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Symptoms of EIA

The clinical signs of EIA vary and include reduced stamina, fatigue, loss of condition and weakness due to anemia. Fever (to 41°C), depression, reduced appetite, rapid breathing, sweating, weight loss, watery eyes, swollen limbs, pale gums, weak pulse, colic or abortion can occur.

Infected horses may have reduced immune function and develop infections like pneumonia. Some horses show no symptoms and in some cases, EIA can cycle between recovery and relapse due to stress brought on by hard work, hot weather or pregnancy.

Transmission of EIA

EIA is most commonly spread by contaminated grooming tools, needles, and medical or dental instruments used on multiple horses. Biting insects can carry the virus in blood on their mouth parts and the virus can pass from a mare to a foal in utero or to mares from the semen of an infected stallion.

Testing for EIA

EIA is diagnosed with a blood test (Coggins) that detects the antibodies produced when a horse is exposed to the virus. Veterinarians submit blood samples to laboratories accredited by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA).

As a horse owner, it is up to you to determine if your horse should be tested and to pay for the test. A negative Coggins test is often needed for horses to attend group events, participate in shows or stay in boarding stables.

Regulation and control of EIA

The CFIA is responsible for the mandatory response phase of the EIA control program, which is delivered at no charge to horse owners.

If a horse has a “reactor” (positive) test, the CFIA is informed and declares the premises where the horse is located to be an infected place with movement restrictions on horses. All horses in contact with the reactor within 30 days of when it was tested are also tested.

The CFIA will order animals destroyed if they test positive and show clinical signs of EIA. If you own a horse that has tested positive but is not showing any clinical signs of EIA, it is up to you to decide to either euthanize the horse or keep it in a permanent quarantine. The CFIA sets out the terms of the quarantine, with the objective of preventing the spread of EIA to other susceptible horses.

The CFIA provides compensation for horses destroyed due to EIA. The amount paid per horse is established by regulation under the federal *Health of Animals Act*.

The CFIA is planning to review the EIA program and will be consulting with those who may be affected by any potential changes.

Animal Health Unit

The Animal Health Unit is responsible for health monitoring and diagnosis of disease in both wildlife and domestic animals. The staff provide expertise in laboratory services and in veterinary medicine to support public health and animal welfare.

The Animal Health Unit and Laboratory are located in the Department of Environment at 10 Burns Road, Whitehorse, Yukon.