

Horse Owners: Remember Biosecurity During Show Season

INDIANAPOLIS (20 March 2013)—The Indiana State Board of Animal Health (BOAH) advises equine owners to take precautions as they begin traveling to shows and exhibitions. Cases of equine herpesvirus (EHV-1) have been popping up all over the United States, including at a large horse show in Florida just last month and a race track in Chicago late last year. **Indiana does not have any known infected horses at this time.**

EHV-1 can cause four types of disease in horses, including a neurological form (equine herpesvirus myeloencephalopathy or EHM), respiratory disease, abortion, and neonatal death. EHM is most often due to mutant or neuropathogenic strains of EHV-1. Horses infected with EHV-1 can be carriers for many years, and appear perfectly healthy until they become stressed by strenuous exercise or long-distance transport.

“We have had cases of EHV-1 before, particularly where large numbers of horses gather,” said Sandra Norman, DVM, veterinarian with BOAH.

Dr. Norman also added, “Although vaccinating horses for equine herpesvirus can help, the vaccine is not a guarantee against infection. Research into the most recent cases has shown that horses vaccinated at least five weeks prior to traveling have been most resistant to the virus. That vaccination must be followed up with booster shots every 3 months to 4 months to maintain effectiveness.”

The most common means of spreading the EHV-1 virus is through nose-to-nose contact between horses. However, the virus can also be passed indirectly through contact with contaminated objects. Individuals working with equine should **always** practice good biosecurity. Tack, grooming equipment, and feed and water buckets should not be shared among horses. While humans cannot contract EHV-1, handlers need to keep their hands and clothing clean, as well, because they can transport the virus.

Show organizers can also be of assistance by keeping records of the origins of the exhibition horses and who their owners are. That way, in case of an outbreak, all owners involved can be notified.

At this time, Indiana is not requiring any additional testing for horses entering the state; however, several other states have mandated entry permits, a certificate of veterinary inspection (CVI) written within 24 hours to 72 hours, and vaccinations. As always, horse owners and veterinarians are advised to contact the state of destination to double-check import requirements before shipping horses.

Regular updates about the EHV-1 outbreaks are being posted to *The Horse* website, which can be accessed through the main BOAH page, www.in.gov/boah. Additional information about the current situation can be found on the USDA-APHIS website at www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/nahss/equine/ehv/.