

Equine Herpesvirus (EHV)

There are 5 types of herpesvirus that infect horses. EHV-1 and EHV-4 are the two that result in serious clinical disease in the horse. EHV-1 is commonly found in horse populations and was previously referred to as the equine abortion virus. Although EHV-1 is a well known reproductive disease, it is also known to cause respiratory and neurological disease. EHV-4 is also known as equine rhinopneumonitis virus and is most common in foals and yearlings. It can also cause abortion and neurological disease.

The incubation period of EHV ranges from 2 to 10 days. Respiratory signs include fever of 102-107 F that lasts for 1 to 7 days, coughing, depression, inappetence, and nasal discharge. Abortion usually occurs between 7 and 10 months of gestation, usually 2 to 10 weeks after infection. Signs of neurologic disease include mild incoordination, hind limb paralysis, recumbency, urinary incontinence, and loss of skin sensation in the hind end.

Transmission occurs when infected and uninfected horses come in direct (nose to nose contact) or indirect (buckets, blankets, clothing) contact with nasal discharge of infected horses. The virus can travel short distances through the air and may also be transmitted by contact with aborted fetuses, placental fluids, or placentas from infected horses.

There are two vaccines on the market to be used as a preventative. Vaccination may reduce the severity and duration of the disease, but will not totally prevent the disease. The best way to prevent an outbreak is to have horses arriving on a farm from other locations to be isolated for 3-4 weeks before being introduced into the resident population. It is also wise to keep pregnant mares away from weanlings, yearlings, and performance horses that travel frequently. It is important if your horse shows any clinical symptoms listed above that you consult your veterinarian ASAP because prognosis may be improved with early treatment.