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OAHN Q2 Survey: Key Results

Each quarter the Ontario Animal Health Network sends out a survey to equine veterinarians to obtain information on health issues affecting horses in the province. This quarter, survey responses were received from 32 counties across the province with 54% of the respondents reporting greater than 50% of their patient base was horses.

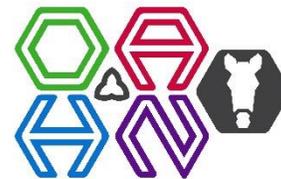
Responses to the “Foals and Breeding stock” section revealed an increase in the number of dystocias (difficult births), foals with pneumonia, and foals with neonatal maladjustment syndrome also called “dummy foal syndrome” reported this quarter compared to Q2 of 2017. Two of the foals had pneumonia due to the bacterium *Streptococcus zooepidemicus* and there was a 1-day-old foal with aspiration pneumonia caused from breathing in birth fluids. Gastrointestinal parasites, namely roundworms and small strongyles, continued to demonstrate resistance to some dewormers particularly in young horses. The continued presence of parasite resistance further reinforces the importance of incorporating fecal exams into parasite control programs as well as proper selection and timing of deworming medications. Contact your veterinarian for more information on how to best protect your horses.

Responses to the “Adult” section of the survey revealed an increase in the reporting of suspected Potomac Horse Fever, dewormer resistance, equine protozoal myelitis (EPM) and “neurological disease suspicious for an infectious cause” compared to Q2 of 2017. Recurrent airway obstruction, previously referred to as “heaves” and inflammatory airway disease (which are both referred to as equine asthma) were commonly reported. One veterinarian noted that horses were having more trouble breathing than in previous years, and another reported some were not responding well to treatment. Four veterinarians noted an increase in itchy skin disease this quarter, and one noted that large insects were causing huge, ulcerative welts. Full body hives (allergic reaction) were also diagnosed requiring large doses of anti-inflammatories to be administered. Some horses, primarily warmbloods, showed signs of colic resulting from stomachs impacted with feed.



Contact us!

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Rabies - What horse owners need to know

(Warning - some of the following information may be disturbing to some people)

Rabies is a fatal viral disease affecting the central nervous system of mammals. In Ontario, it is typically spread by certain wild animals namely raccoons, skunks, foxes and bats. Horses are usually infected with the virus by a rabid animal through a bite on the muzzle/head area or on the legs, however, bite wounds can be very small (e.g. bat bite) and may not be noticed.

Signs of rabies in horses are quite variable and mimic other diseases that affect the nervous system including those caused by equine herpesvirus-1, West Nile virus, eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) virus, and severe liver disease. A veterinarian should examine the animal and may need to run some tests to rule out these and other causes of neurologic signs when possible.

The most common signs of rabies in horses in North America include a wobbly gait, weakness, paralysis of the muscles controlling the throat leading to problems eating and drinking, and the inability to stand. Other signs can include aggression, biting, making abnormal vocal sounds, increased sensitivity to touch and sound, and convulsions. Early signs can also mimic more common problems such as lameness and colic. Because these and other signs can also occur with non-life threatening conditions, it is important to note that, with rabies, these signs in horses are progressive, quickly become associated with other neurological signs and typically warrant euthanasia in 3-5 days if the horse does not succumb on its own.

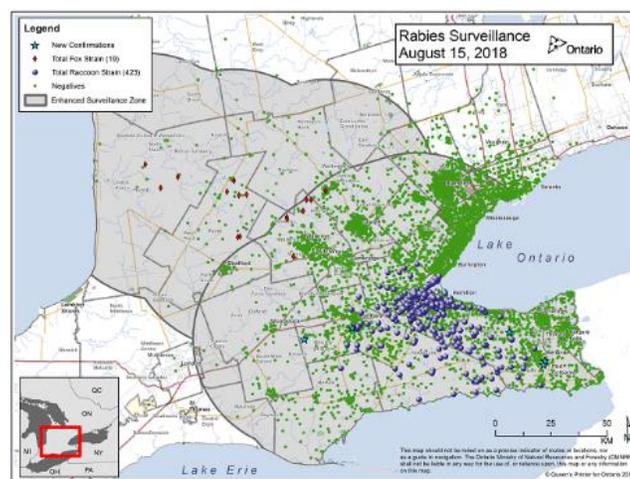
What happens if your veterinarian believes that rabies is a possible diagnosis for your horse?

If your veterinarian believes, based on her or his examination, including the history of the horse and rabies vaccination status that rabies is a possibility for your horse, he /she will first ask if there has been any risk of human exposure to the horse's saliva. If there has, or the veterinarian is uncertain, the local public health unit must be contacted, by either you or your veterinarian, to assess the rabies risk to people.

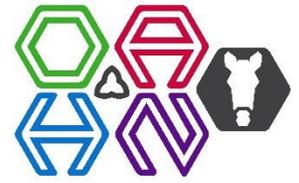
What will the public health unit do?

The public health inspector will conduct a risk assessment either over the phone (or sometimes in person) for anyone who may have been exposed to the horse's saliva in the last 2 weeks before the horse got sick. If he or she determines that there is a risk, then the horse's brain will need to be tested for rabies if it is euthanized or dies. *Note: it is not possible to test for rabies while the horse is still alive.*

If the test is negative, there is no further action taken. However, if the test is positive (or unfit) the public health unit will arrange for post-exposure treatment for individuals considered to be exposed to the virus.



Click on the map for more information



What if there was no human exposure but other horses or animals were exposed to the potentially rabid horse?

If other domestic animals were in contact with the potentially rabid horse, your veterinarian will contact the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and a risk assessment will be conducted over the phone by a rabies response (RR) veterinarian. If the RR veterinarian feels that the horse should be tested for rabies, the brain will need to be removed after a veterinarian euthanizes the animal or if it dies.

If the rabies test is negative, there will be no further action taken. If it is positive (or unfit), other livestock on the property (including horses) that were potentially exposed to the sick horse's saliva (e.g. through sharing feed or water) will be placed under a precautionary confinement period for 40 days. This means that these animals will not be allowed to leave the property or have any contact with other domestic animals on the property and human contact with the animals will be limited. Your veterinarian will recommend that all exposed animals be (re)vaccinated for rabies as soon as possible even if the vaccinations are current. This is done to booster the antibody response to help neutralize any virus in the body.

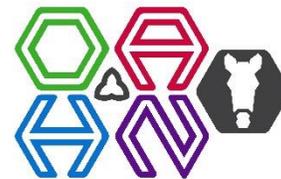
The best way to protect your horse from rabies is by preventing contact with wildlife and through vaccination.

What do I need to know about vaccinating my horse for rabies?

The Regulations under the Health Promotion and Protection Act, administered by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, require that dogs, cats and ferrets over 3 months old and certain livestock (including horses) be vaccinated against rabies using only a vaccine licensed for use in Canada, according to the manufacturer's instructions and **only by a veterinarian** registered under the Veterinarians Act. Go [here](#) for further information on the Act.

Horses in settings where the general public is encouraged and/or expected to have direct contact with them are **legally required** to be vaccinated against rabies. Examples of settings that fit into this category include petting zoos; corporate birthday parties, and other "animal experience" events; and interactive animal exhibits where members of the public are intended to handle or pet the animals. Therapy animals, service animals and riding school horses would also fall under the scope of the vaccination requirements. Go [here](#) for further information.





My horse had a reaction to the rabies vaccine and I need to show proof of vaccination. What do I do?

If the horse has a medical condition that prevents vaccination or re-vaccination, the owner is exempt from the regulatory requirement IF:

- ✓ A veterinarian writes a statement of exemption AND
- ✓ The horse is controlled in a manner to prevent exposure to rabies

The results of a rabies titre test will not provide an exemption to this regulation.

Rabies is a serious disease but fortunately the vaccine is very effective for preventing disease in horses when administered appropriately. Horse owners in Ontario should be aware of the risk of rabies to their horse particularly since southern Ontario has been dealing with an outbreak of racoon rabies since 2015. No horses have tested positive in this outbreak and none have tested positive in Ontario since 2007.

For more information on rabies in Ontario please go to <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/inspection/ahw/rabies.htm>.

To stay up-to-date on the location of rabies positive animals in Ontario please go to <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/inspection/ahw/rabieszone.htm>

or follow OAHN on Facebook ([@OntarioAnimalHealthNetwork](https://www.facebook.com/OntarioAnimalHealthNetwork)) or Twitter ([@OntAnHealthNet](https://twitter.com/OntAnHealthNet))

