

May 21, 2020

Three confirmed cases of equine herpes myeloencephalopathy

On May 17, 2020, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) was notified of two confirmed cases of equine herpes myeloencephalopathy (EHM) due to equine herpes virus-1 (EHV-1) at a racing facility in the City of Toronto. The horses were referred to an equine hospital for diagnosis and treatment of progressive neurological disease. A third horse from the same barn was referred to an equine hospital on May 18 where it was also confirmed with EHM. All three horses are recovering. A fourth horse was euthanized at the racing facility on May 18 and EHM was suspected. The barn housed 60 horses with another 1,470 horses on the property. All horses which have tested positive have been moved to an isolation barn on the property. The facility manager, trainers and veterinarians are following strict biosecurity measures and movement restrictions are in place.

Three horses at a farm in Dufferin County with an epidemiological link to the racing facility have tested positive for EHV-1. Two of the horses have signs of respiratory disease. The farm manager has put movement restrictions and biosecurity protocols in place under the supervision of the attending veterinarian.

EHV-1 does not pose a threat to public health or food safety.

EHV-1 infection is immediately notifiable by laboratories to OMAFRA under the Animal Health Act. Attending veterinarians concerned about potential cases of EHV-1 infection may contact an OMAFRA veterinarian through the Agricultural Information Contact Centre at 1-877-424-1300.

*EHV-1 infection in horses can cause
respiratory disease, abortion, neonatal foal death,
and/or neurological disease.*

Agricultural Information Contact Centre
1-877-424-1300

E-mail : ag.info.omafra@ontario.ca
www.ontario.ca/omafra

Because a fever (greater than 101.5 °F or 38.6 °C) may be the first indication of infection, the temperature of potentially exposed animals should be monitored and recorded twice daily for 21 days and any abnormalities discussed with a veterinarian. In certain situations, this time frame can be reduced to 14 days if associated with testing to ensure horses are no longer shedding the virus. Neurological signs, if they develop, may include loss of balance, hind-limb weakness, difficulty urinating, decreased tail tone, depression and being down and unable to rise. It is important that a veterinarian assess horses demonstrating neurological signs since it can be difficult to distinguish this from other serious diseases such as rabies.

EHV-1 infection is easily spread to other horses by nose-to-nose or close contact with an infected horse, by sharing contaminated equipment including bits, buckets and towels or by the clothing and hands of people who have recently had contact with an infected horse. It is important, therefore, to restrict movement for 21 days (or 14 days with testing provisions) of both people and horses where EHV-1 has been diagnosed. Any person leaving a facility to care for or be in contact with horses elsewhere should change their clothes, shoes/boots and wash their hands before leaving the property. Facility owners should also inform all service providers that have attended the facility within the last week, including, but not restricted to, veterinarians, farriers, feed suppliers and transporters, of the presence of the virus at the facility so they can take appropriate precautions.

Prevention is the best medicine

Biosecurity is key to preventing spread of EHV-1. Implementing routine biosecurity measures is the best way to minimize viral spread and should be in place at all times to prevent a disease outbreak. Such measures include hand hygiene and basic cleaning and disinfection practices. Horses that have been shipped long distances (out of province) and that are entering environments with a high risk for viral spread (young competition horses), should be segregated for 14 days prior to entering the general population.

EHV-1 vaccines marketed for prevention of respiratory disease may reduce viral shedding but are not protective against developing the neurological form of the disease in the vaccinated animal.

For additional information:

AGCO

<https://www.agco.ca/blog/horse-racing/may-2020/industry-notice-confirmed-cases-ehv-1-woodbine-racetrack-monitoring-and>

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Preventing Disease Spread - Personal Hygiene and Disinfectants around Horse Barns:
<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/horses/facts/prev-disease-spread.htm>

Horses - Health Management and Biosecurity:
<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/horses/health.html>

Equine Neurological Disease Surveillance 2018:
http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/horses/facts/nhd_surv2018.htm

CFIA

National Farm and Facility Level Biosecurity Standard for the Equine Sector:
<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/animals/terrestrial-animals/biosecurity/standards-and-principles/equine-sector/eng/1460662612042/1460662650577>

EQUINE GUELPH

Equine Biosecurity Risk Calculator:
http://www.equineguelph.ca/Tools/biosecurity_2011.php

ALBERTA VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION AND ALBERTA EQUESTRIAN FEDERATION

Equine Biosecurity Principles and Best Practices:
[http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$Department/deptdocs.nsf/all/cpv13683/\\$FILE/equine_biosecurity_principles_and_best_practices_guide.pdf](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$Department/deptdocs.nsf/all/cpv13683/$FILE/equine_biosecurity_principles_and_best_practices_guide.pdf)

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