

Equine Herpes Virus 1 neurological disease outbreak

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Several sources have recently reported cases of equine Herpesvirus Myeloencephalopathy (EHM). Affected horses have been diagnosed in **Colorado**, Washington, Utah and several other western states, with initial cases largely associated with the National Cutting Horse Association competition in Ogden, Utah, held from April 30 to May 8. At this time, the extent of the disease outbreak is unclear. Veterinarians in the Sacramento area, including those at the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, are encouraging owners to educate themselves about this disease and ways that they can protect their horses.

EHM is caused by Equine Herpes Virus 1 (EHV-1). EHV-1 can cause two different types of disease. One causes abortion in mares and the other results in respiratory and neurological problems. The current outbreak involves the latter form. The first and most common sign of this disease is an elevated temperature. Horses should have their temperature taken twice a day. Horses with a temperature over 102 degrees should have a nasal swab taken for testing to see if they are shedding the EHV-1 virus. Other symptoms may include nasal discharge, cough, and reddish-colored mucous membranes. Nervous system signs can progress rapidly after the first clinical signs are observed. Affected horses may be uncoordinated, weak and unable to stand, exhibit lethargy and a coma-like state and may have trouble urinating or defecating.

The disease spreads from horse to horse through direct contact, sharing of equipment, or on the hands and clothes of handlers. As a result, horses that traveled from the show in Ogden may have exposed other horses at their home barns. Owners of horses that attended the show in question should limit the movement of their horses and consider isolation of their horse from other horses for at least two weeks. Horses that show symptoms of EHM should receive immediate veterinary care. There is no evidence that current EHV-1 vaccines can prevent EHM.

Although EHM is highly contagious and is a significant health concern to horses, it does not pose a risk to humans. For more information about EHV-1 and how to protect your horses, please visit the UC Davis Center for Equine Health's information page at http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/ceh/ehv1_general.cfm. Additional information about the severity of the current outbreak and its impact on Northern California should be available in the next few days.