

Equine Virus could Jeopardize Horse Events

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An outbreak of equine herpes virus at an Ogden horse competition could halt all horse events in Utah if the disease spreads.

At least eight horses were diagnosed with a serious, neurological strain of the virus, EHV-1, after attending the National Cutting Horse Association's western national championships earlier this month at the Golden Spike Event Center in Ogden, said state veterinarian Bruce L. King.

"Probably at least that many, if not double that many, are showing clinical signs but have not been confirmed with a lab diagnosis," King said. About 500 horses were at the show, he said.

The confirmed diagnoses all are outside of Utah, but several Utah horses are symptomatic and are undergoing tests, King said. Most of the horses with confirmed cases have been euthanized.

The virus, which is most often spread through horse-to-horse contact, normally is contained after a single outbreak and does not spread beyond the event where transmission occurred.

However, if this virus proves more contagious and infects horses that were not at the Ogden show, the strain "is not acting as we know it to act, and we probably are working with an emerging disease," King said.

In that case, King said, he would recommend that all horse events in Utah be canceled — a decree that would include all rodeos, races and shows, from jumping contests to 4-H events at county fairs.

"That would have a huge impact; so many people are involved with horses in Utah," said Bonnie East, member and former president of the Wasatch Range Eventing Association, which oversees equestrian triathlons in the state. "But they have to do what's in the best interest of the horses."

A jumping clinic already was canceled this weekend at Golden Spike because of the outbreak at the cutting horse championships, East said.

"The ... course probably was not affected at all, but we didn't want to take any chances," East said.

King said lab results for some of the Utah horses may be available as early as Tuesday. Colorado, Idaho, Canada and California have confirmed diagnoses in horses that were at the Ogden show, which ran from April 29 to May 8.

Symptoms include fever, decreased coordination, nasal discharge, urine dribbling, tail limpness, hind-limb weakness, poor balance and lethargy.

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