



## Biosecurity for Your Horses

**Guest  
Columnist**

Dr. Jeff Johnson

Blue Sky  
Animal Hospital



*With the show season approaching* I wish to remind horse lovers to remember biosecurity. Two cases of equine herpes in Jefferson County horses have prompted Wisconsin's state veterinarian to remind horse owners to practice good biosecurity and to be aware of any change in their animals' health.

There is no human health threat.

Three horses on a Jefferson County farm became ill in mid-January with signs of the neurological form of equine herpes virus 1 (EHV-1). Two of the horses tested positive for EHV-1. One of these was humanely euthanized and the other is recovering. The third horse tested negative, but also had to be euthanized.

"Two positive tests don't make for an outbreak, but do serve as a reminder that these diseases show up outside the East Coast states and Florida, where the horse industry has traditionally been concentrated," said Dr. Robert

Ehlenfeldt of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. "And, as the number of horses keeps increasing in ... the Midwest, we can expect to deal with more of these issues." Wisconsin's livestock premises registry has about 18,000 horse farms listed.

EHV-1 may cause pregnant mares to abort and newborn foals to die. Usually it is a respiratory disease, with fever, nasal discharge and cough, but occasionally attacks the brain and spinal cord and causes neurological symptoms. Horses with this form of infection may stumble or be unable to stand, have difficulty producing urine or manure, show inflammation and swelling in their legs, and develop small hemorrhages on their gums.

The virus is transmitted when infected animals cough or sneeze, but can also spread in contaminated water and feed or on the hands and clothing of people handling horses. In some cases, the virus remains dormant in the horse's brain, causing a lifelong infection that can flare up, although scientists are uncertain what causes flare-ups to occur. There is no treatment other than alleviating symptoms. Although EHV-1 vaccines exist, none is known to protect against the neurologic form of the virus.

In December 2006, 12 horses in Florida became ill with



EHV-1 and six were euthanized, while another fatal case was reported in California. All these cases were traced to a shipment of horses that came into the United States from Germany in November 2006. There have also been several other recent outbreaks elsewhere in the nation. Ehlenfeldt said the Jefferson County cases have no connection with any of these outbreaks, and the horses had not come in contact with other animals outside the stable where they were housed.

"This is not a highly contagious disease, but it points out again the need to practice good biosecurity," Ehlenfeldt said. To prevent infectious disease, he advised horse owners:

- Keep new horses, horses returning from competition and sick horses isolated for at least seven days. If you know they've been exposed to EHV-1, isolate them for at least 21 days.
- Employees and riders should wear leather or rubber-soled shoes or boots that can be disinfected. Keep disinfectant solution in a tub at the barn entrance and change it daily. All visitors, including veterinarians and blacksmiths, should use the solution and a brush to clean shoes before entering and when they leave.
- Those who handle the horses should wash their hands first.
- Don't share water buckets, feed tubs or stalls among horses, and keep horses in the smallest possible groups. This helps contain any infections that may occur when one horse is contagious.
- If horses have been exposed to EHV-1, take rectal temperatures daily and call a veterinarian if an adult horse's temperature exceeds 101 degrees F.
- There are vaccines available for EHV-1. Ask your veterinarian

which one he or she recommends for your horses.

If you feel your horse has been exposed or have questions about the Wisconsin cases, you may contact State Veterinarian Bob Ehlenfeldt at [robert.ehlenfeldt@datcp.state.wi.us](mailto:robert.ehlenfeldt@datcp.state.wi.us).

#### CENTRAL FLORIDA TORNADO UPDATE

We have many concerned pet owners that are part of our hospital family. So many stepped up to help with Hurricane Katrina, and some have recently inquired about last month's tornado in Florida. Below is the information I have. (This information is subject to change as additional information becomes available.)

According to a report from the American Veterinary Medical Association and Dr. Thomas J. Holt, DVM, State Veterinarian/Director, "The State Emergency Operations Center (EOC) has been up and running since Friday morning, Feb. 2, and personnel assessed the affected areas. Frequent contact was made by the State EOC with the local EOCs in the affected counties. Local resources were available to meet the needs from an animal and agricultural standpoint. State Agriculture Response Team groups were on standby in the event that they were needed but have not been called upon. Adjacent counties provided some assistance with small animal issues, as requested."

Enjoy your horse. — **Dr. Jeff Johnson** 🐾

*Dr. Jeff Johnson practices with Blue Sky Animal Hospital in Wyoming, Minn., treating large and small animals as well as exotics. To reach Dr. Johnson call 651-462-7387 or go to [www.blueskyanimal.com](http://www.blueskyanimal.com).*

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