

Fact Sheet

Equine Herpes Virus

EHV-1 and EHV-4

What is EHV?

Equine herpes viruses are a group of viruses that can cause contagious disease in horses. The two most significant types are Equine Herpes Virus 1 (EHV-1) and Equine Herpes Virus 4 (EHV-4) and they are often collectively referred to as Equine Herpes Virus (EHV).



Respiratory and Neurological EHV

Respiratory EHV is endemic in the UK, which means it is everywhere: clinical signs are often mild and your horse may even have had it in the past without you realising it.

The respiratory form of the disease can be caused by both EHV-1 and EHV4: it is reported that 80-90% of horses are infected with EHV before the age of 2 years old without you realising it.

The neurological form of the disease is rare and obviously is very serious. Many horses do not survive. This form is usually due to EHV-1.

EHV can also be associated with abortion, still birth and severe neonatal illness.



Biosecurity

EHV-1 is spread by direct contact from horse to horse through nasal discharge or as aerosol droplets. It can also be spread indirectly by horses coming into contact with contaminated clothes, barns or stables. Humans can spread the virus by contaminated hands and clothing.

Strict biosecurity rules should be applied to reduce the risk of infection in at-risk premises.

General biosecurity procedures:

- Know your horse's normal vital signs and behaviour
- Practice good hygiene - wash your hands before and after you attend to your horse
- Ensure you keep your horse's grooming kit, feed buckets, rugs etc separate from others to avoid crosscontamination and regularly clean them
- Clean water buckets and feed buckets daily
- Keep the muck heap away from the horses
- Ensure all your horse's vaccinations are up to date
- Make sure everyone on your yard understands the biosecurity protocols set in place
- Isolate all new horses

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EHV Vaccination

Vaccinations for EHV-1 are available but the use of these vaccinations should be discussed with your veterinary surgeon to ensure it is correct for your setting.

The EHV vaccination should not be considered as an alternative to good biosecurity. We encourage horse owners to quarantine all horses newly arrived on their premises.

Whilst EHV vaccination reduces shedding of the virus and makes clinical signs milder, it does not necessarily abolish either. However, reducing shedding helps to minimise risk to other horses when a horse is infected with EHV.

It is important not to undertake vaccination during an active outbreak and we would always recommend vaccination is done when horses are in a stable population and not in a state of stress.

After the initial booster course, vaccination needs to be maintained at 6 monthly intervals in order to provide the best protection.



Signs of EHV

- Early signs of EHV-1 infection in horses are often just a fever with dullness and poor appetite
- Respiratory signs such as a runny nose or cough might also be seen as well as enlarged glands under the jaw
- In rarer instances more serious symptoms can develop such as abortion and abnormal neurological signs
- If they develop, they frequently involve weakness and wobbliness of the hindlegs and tail and difficulty passing urine or faeces, although other odd behaviours are also possible



Further Information

More information about EHV, and EHV vaccinations, is available on horsedialog.co.uk. Owners of broodmares and racehorse trainers should refer to the HBLB's Codes of Practice and the National Trainers Federation (NTF). Advice is also available via the HBLB's free EquiBioSafe mobile app for iOS and Android.

For further information, please contact your local VetPartners Equine Veterinary Practice on:

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