

Equine Infectious Anemia

This disease is endemic in certain parts of Australia.

Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) is a contagious viral disease that affects horses worldwide. EIA is a disease of all the horse family. Other livestock are not known to be affected by this virus. EIA is also known as swamp fever. The highest number of cases occurs in warm climates because of the prevalence of blood sucking insects that are the primary transmitters of this disease. Once infected, horses will remain lifelong carriers of the virus.

There are acute, chronic, and inapparent forms of this disease. In the acute form, horses may have a high fever, depression, loss of appetite, small areas of haemorrhages on the mucous membranes, swelling of the legs and oedema (collection of fluid) along the ventral abdomen. The acute form of this disease usually occurs within seven to 30 days after exposure to the virus.

In the chronic form of the disease, horses may suffer recurring signs of intermittent fever, depression, lack of appetite with weight loss, anemia, and weakness often seen as loss of coordination of the hind quarters.

Some horses become infected with EIA without detectable clinical signs of the disease and are unknown carriers of this virus.

The majority of clinical signs associated with EIA infection are related to the reaction of the horse's immune system to the virus.

The severity and frequency of these recurring episodes decrease with time. Abortion or failure to conceive may also occur in EIA infected mares. Horses generally recover from either the acute or chronic form of this clinical disease, but will remain lifelong carriers of the virus.

Other methods of transmission include the use of virus-contaminated instruments such as needles, syringes, and dental and tattooing equipment. In EIA infected pregnant mares, approximately ten percent of their foals are born infected with the virus, apparently due to placental transmission. Transmission of the virus may also occur through natural breeding of mares and stallions, but is not a primary method. At this time there is no effective treatment for EIA. Infected horses are lifelong carriers of this virus. There is currently no vaccine to protect a horse against EIA. Investigators are working toward the development of a vaccine. The problem with vaccine development is that it not only needs to protect the animals against EIA, but investigators have to be able to distinguish between an EIA titer caused by disease and a titer caused by a vaccine.

An effective vaccine would help eradicate the threat of EIA for the horse population.

A Horse with EIA

