

# EQUINE INFECTIOUS ANEMIA

Equine infectious anaemia (EIA or Swamp Fever) is a debilitating viral disease of horses. It is caused by a virus of the Lentivirinae subfamily (Retroviridae family) which is closed to the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). EIA is present in many countries, but is often confined to specific regions and has a variable prevalence and severity. In Australia, the only area where EIA can be regarded as endemic is along the inland river systems of central and western Queensland.

Whilst the disease may manifest initially in an acute form with the possibility of some early deaths, EIA is generally a chronic disease characterised by:

- Progressive loss of condition
- Muscle weakness and poor stamina
- Rough coat
- Depression
- Anemia.

There may be intermittent acute episodes in which affected animals show:

- Fever
- Severe depression
- Anorexia
- Loss of coordination especially in the hindquarters
- Haemorrhages of the mucous membranes
- Eye and nasal discharges
- Jaundice
- Diarrhoea
- Oedema of the head, trunk and limbs.

Death may occur during an acute episode. Sub-clinical and mild infections are common. The acute form of this disease usually occurs within seven to 30 days after exposure to the virus.

EIA virus is transmitted by flies and some mosquitoes. 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.

No specific treatment is available. Supportive treatment, including blood transfusions can be considered. However, because recovered horses become carriers, if the disease occurs in a previously free area it is generally better to destroy affected horses.

In endemic areas, risk of infection can be reduced by protecting horses from insect vectors where practicable. For example:

- Keeping horses away from low lying areas
- Removing breeding sources for insects
- Use of insecticides Insect-proof stabling

