

Equine Disease Tipping point?

Is the outbreak of Equine Herpes Virus caused myeloencephalopathy on a North Island thoroughbred stud in January a tipping point for New Zealand equine disease management?

Unlike their overseas counterparts New Zealand horse owners and trainers move and mingle their horses around our country with seemingly total impunity.

As a groom in the States in the 1980's I was constantly taking temperatures and horse health was a regular concern.

North America has been having to practice quarantine of shows with a growing regularity as the neurological form of EHV-1 has become a more common occurrence in the last decade. It may be that the key factors that contribute to the North American situation are not in New Zealand. Be they stress, some characteristic of the organism or whatever and only research and time will tell us.

If this is the case then we are indeed lucky but if not then horse owners will need to add some tools into their kit. In the spirit preparedness and "its better to be safe than sorry", we need to "up" our surveillance.

The simplest thing we can do is LOOK and LISTEN to our horses....and I don't mean horse whispering! If they look sick, then find out why. If you are a practical sort of "do it your selfer" then take their temperature and get started on isolating your sick mate. Don't even think of taking him to a show.

Isolation of sick horses and early determination of the cause of their symptoms is very important. Infections other than EHV-1 can also spread by horse-to-horse contact, so keeping a horse with a fever isolated is a very good practice.

If your horse develops fever, respiratory signs or neurological signs, immediately notify your veterinarian and do not move the horse or horses in the immediate area. Alert those who have horses in the adjacent area to cease all movement of horses in and out of the facility until a diagnosis is confirmed by testing. If horses are exposed and then travel to a new stable or show, the infection can spread to other horses at that

new location.

EHV-1 does not persist in the environment for a long time, but disinfection of premises, stalls, trailers and so forth is indicated. If you handle a horse with EHV-1 and don't wash hands or change clothing, you may spread the infection to other horses. A solution of 1 part chlorine bleach to 10 parts water is effective for decontaminating equipment and environment.

If you didn't read about Government industry agreements -the new way of responding and paying for exotic disease response in the last Bulletin then go read it now! If you want to learn more about the Equine Myeloencephalopathy outbreak then go to the MPI site for the latest update
<http://www.mpi.govt.nz/biosecurity-animal-welfare/pests-diseases/ehv-1-myeloencephalopathy>