

About Equine Herpes Virus Summer 2011

Members of MHJA,

As many of you know, there is an outbreak of the Equine Herpes Virus (EHV-1), which is a lethal, neurological strain of the virus. The outbreak started at the National Cutting Horse Championship in Ogden UT. The virus is easily spread through the air, by physical contact and on contaminated items like hands, clothing, brushes, tack, etc. I have heard (unofficial) reports that the virus can live up to 3 weeks without a host. Agricultural officials have reported that horses in Canada, Idaho, Utah, Colorado, California, Washington, and possibly Arizona have contracted the disease resulting in many deaths.

Montana officials say 35 horses from this state were potentially exposed at the show where the outbreak began. There are not yet any diagnosed cases here in Montana but there are horses under quarantine. Symptoms include fever, nasal discharge, urine dribbling, tail limpness, hind limb weakness, poor balance and, lethargy. Veterinarians in Montana are strongly encouraging owners to avoid traveling with their horses and to minimize contact with people that have exposure to a wide variety of horses such as vets, farriers, chiropractors, etc.

As president of MHJA and on behalf of the board it is our recommendation that you avoid traveling with your horse to shows, clinics, etc for at least another two weeks. Veterinarians state that it will be impossible to predict how the disease is progressing for at least that long. We encourage show managers to postpone or cancel any events in the next 2 to 3 weeks until further information is known or the outbreak is contained.

Although the board recommends these restrictions, the final decision comes down to the horse owners. You must make your own personal decisions based on the safety of your horse and other horses if your horse becomes exposed. We can look at a worst-case scenario: We cancel or decide not to attend an event. Then a month later it turns out the disease was contained and there wasn't any danger here in Montana. This results in angry and/or disappointed members and event managers but we have healthy horses. Or: We go ahead with scheduled events, Then a month later it turns out the virus did get to Montana. This results in devastated members with sick or dead horses and no more shows for the summer.

In another 2-3 weeks I will issue another statement and recommendations from the board regarding future scheduled events. In the meantime, if you have further questions regarding this disease contact your veterinarian or a board member. Give our healthy horse a hug and be thankful.

Deanna Hovland
President, MHJA