Equine Infectious Anemia

From the world's racetracks to your local riding trail; from the cattle ranch to the show ring, Florida's horses are recognized as some of the best in the world. It is estimated that Florida's equine population is over 350,000, with an overall estimated economic impact of $6.5 billion annually and a capital investment of $7 billion. The state's equine industry is comprised of a variety of horses; from the sleek and graceful Thoroughbred, to the elegant Arabian, the sophisticated gaited horses, the quick and powerful Quarter horse, even our very own Florida Cracker Horse, descendents of horses left in Florida by early Spanish settlers. It doesn't matter whether you are the owner of a large breeding farm or a youth with one pony and big dreams, you are faced with a common nemesis **– Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA).**

EIA is an infectious viral disease that affects only members of the equine species. It was first reported in France in 1843 and is currently recognized as a significant disease of horses worldwide. The disease was first reported in the United States in 1888. It is commonly referred to as "swamp fever." EIA is an incurable disease which is characterized by three distinct forms: acute, chronic and inapparant. In the acute form, the horse will show signs of anemia, fever, depression, progressive weakness, loss of weight and swelling of the legs, brisket and abdominal areas. Many of these horses become extremely ill and die. Horses that have the chronic form are generally horses that have recovered from the acute or subacute form. These horses usually present intermittent attacks of the acute or subacute form which last from one week to a month or more between attacks. The most common form seen in horses is the inapparent carrier state. In this form, the horses appear clinically healthy; however, the horses still carry the virus and are potential sources of infection for other horses.

The virus is primarily spread by blood-to-blood contact. The most common means of spread is through large biting insects (i.e., horseflies and deerflies) and contaminated medical instruments and needles. It has also been shown that the virus may occasionally be transmitted through breeding, and from infected mares to nursing foals. There is conflicting evidence regarding mare to foal transmission through the placenta.

There are currently no vaccines available to protect horses against EIA. Once a horse becomes infected, it remains infected for the remainder of its life, as there is no treatment that rids the affected horse of the virus. While some horses may die within a week or so after becoming infected, most remain as seemingly symptomless carriers (i.e., "inapparent carriers") for an indefinite period of time until major stress or lowered resistance allows the virus to gain the upper hand. Subclinical cases may go unnoticed because the symptoms mimic those of other, more common, horse diseases.

Although EIA occurs to some degree in most states, 90 percent of the cases occur in what is known as the "hot zone," the states bordering the Southern Atlantic Coast, the Gulf of Mexico, the Mississippi River, plus Texas and Oklahoma. The disease transmission risks are higher in these regions, in part, because of the large number of horseflies and deerflies, as well as a large number of untested horses. The threat of exposure of horses to EIA will continue to exist under these conditions until such time as more uniform control measures are implemented across the country. In addition, sporadic outbreaks in Virginia, New York, Pennsylvania, Utah, Montana, and even as far north as Alberta, Canada, in 1999 should convince horse owners that the disease continues to threaten horses in North America.

Florida's horse industry is a vital part of the state's economy, and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has a statutory responsibility to take all reasonable steps to protect it. Because of the severe economic impact EIA could have on the state's equine industry, the Department, in consultation and with strong support from industry leaders, has implemented a regulatory program to control the disease.

The Department's EIA control program consists of annually requiring horses that are moved from their farm of origin be tested for the disease. If you are a horse owner, or are thinking of becoming one, you need to know that Florida's rules require:

- All horses imported into the state, or moving within the state, must have a negative EIA report conducted within the previous 12 months. Foals under six months of age accompanied by the dam who has a current negative EIA test within the past 12 months are exempt.

- Horses congregating at public or private assemblies must have a report of a negative EIA test conducted in the previous 12 months. These assemblies include boarding stables and pastures, shows, exhibitions, fairs, rodeos, racetracks, trail rides, and any other public or private assemblies.

- All horses, must have a report of a negative EIA test conducted within the previous 12 months forchange of ownership. This includes both public and private sales, trial usage, gifts, and rental for leases.

- All horses used for breeding purposes must have a report of a negative EIA test conducted within 12 months prior to breeding.

- Test samples must be collected by a Florida licensed and USDA accredited veterinarian and submitted to USDA-approved laboratories on official test record forms.

- Any horse disclosed as positive for EIA on an official test will be permanently identified as a reactor by a freeze brand on the left side of the neck. The animal will then be placed in permanent quarantine on an approved premise. The only other option for a reactor is euthanasia.

It is the responsibility of the owner of a boarding stable or pasture, the sponsor of an event, or the person designated in charge of an event (assembly), to ensure that test requirements are met. This owner/sponsor must maintain records which include the following information on all horses for each occasion the horse enters the assembly point.

- The name of the horse
- The name of the owner or the representative
- The EIA test date, (date blood drawn)
- The name of the laboratory conducting the test
- The laboratory accession number of the report of the EIA test

The only protection against EIA is preventing exposure of negative horses to non-tested horses and known infected horses. Stopping the spread of EIA is the responsibility of everyone. Have your horses tested annually and do not allow them to co-mingle with horses of unknown status.

For a complete copy of all rules and regulations relating to animal health, movement, sale and slaughter, please contact the **Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Animal Industry, 407 South Calhoun Street, Room 331 Mayo Building, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0800, telephone (850) 410-0900.**

Violations of § 585.671, Florida Statutes (F.S.), and Chapter 5C-18, Florida Administrative Code (FAC), are subject to the imposition of an administrative fine of up to $10,000 for each offense. Upon repeated violations the Department may seek enforcement pursuant to § 120.69, F.S. Further, unless otherwise provided, any person violating the provisions of this section will be guilty of a misdemeanor of the second degree, punishable as provided in § 775.082, or 775.083, F.S.

www.doacs.state.fl.us/ai/

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Negative Report of EIA (Coggins test)
Don't Leave Home Wihout It!

IT'S THE LAW

Florida Department of Agriculture
and Consumer Services
Charles H. Bronson, Commissioner