

AgNews



DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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To: Newsroom Directors and Assignment Editors

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Neurological Herpes (EHV-1) in western states brings biosecurity advice from Delaware State Veterinarian

Horse owners, trainers, and veterinarians are on high alert throughout the US and Canada this week because of an outbreak of contagious disease among horses throughout the Western US. Although Delaware hasn't received any traces (horses at high risk of exposure), the Office of the State veterinarian has been following the outbreak closely. The outbreak is related to a regional equine event, the *National Cutting Horse Association's Western National Championships* that occurred in Ogden, UT from April 30 through May 8, 2011. Between 300 and 400 horses attended the Utah event from 29 different States and Canada. The viral disease causing the outbreak is called EHM (equine herpes myeloencephalopathy) and is caused by the contagious Equine Herpes Virus (EHV-1), which does NOT affect humans. Currently, horses that were potentially exposed to the Herpes virus in Ogden are being followed in 18 different states to determine whether they contracted the virus. As of May 19, 2011, the disease has resulted in the euthanasia of 7 horses in 5 states (AZ, CA, CO, ID, NM). Another 26 horses have been confirmed as infected in a total of 8 states (CA, CO, ID, NM, OR, TX, UT, WA). **No Delaware horses participated in the Cutting Horse show and there are no cases of EHV-1 reported in Delaware at this time.**

Most horses in Delaware are vaccinated for this virus, but unfortunately the vaccine does not protect horses against the severe neurologic form of herpes infection. The State veterinarian requires that all horses with neurological virus be reported to her office, so that EHV-1 infection can be ruled out. Neurological herpes virus is a regulated disease in Delaware and in many other states throughout the US. The last occurrence of this disease in Delaware was in December 2008. At that time, Dr. Hirst and her staff quarantined two farms in Kent County following reports by practicing veterinarians of two neurological horses. The entire episode lasted 45 days and affected the entire Delaware harness racing industry because both quarantines involved training facilities, during a time when a Dover Downs race meet was in progress.

The activity within the Department of Agriculture this week related to the outbreak has been primarily through emails and teleconferences with all 50 State health officials and Federal (USDA) veterinarians. The office of the state veterinarian will continue to keep the Delaware equine industry apprised of the news through email updates and website posts, and will take any phone inquiries at 302-698-4500. Because of the fact that Delaware has a large and active equine industry, it is imperative that the outbreak is carefully followed, in the event that ongoing investigation should trace a horse or horses to Delaware.

The earliest clinical signs of the neurologic form of EHV include fever (101.5 F or higher) and ataxia (incoordination). The respiratory form of the disease (snotty, runny nose) may or may not precede the neurologic form. The virus is spread most commonly via respiratory secretions, but may also be carried on contaminated equipment, clothing and hands of personnel. There is no human health hazard associated with EHV-1, but the neurologic form can be fatal to equines.

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Because of the contagious nature of EHV-1, Dr. Heather Hirst, Delaware State Veterinarian says, “The outbreak in the Western part of the country, although unfortunate, serves as an excellent reminder to horse owners everywhere that good biosecurity practices are essential in the prevention of contagious disease.”

The following biosecurity recommendations can be employed for horses at home and before, during, and after any future shows, competitions, and trail rides:

- Make sure immunizations are up to date. Your practicing veterinarian is the best advisor for which vaccinations are recommended for your horse. In many cases, West Nile Virus and rabies vaccinations will be recommended along with Flu/Rhino/Tetanus.
- Temp your horse and give him a thorough evaluation before any travel. Never load a horse with a fever or any other signs of illness, unless you are hauling him to your veterinarian’s office.
- While at the show, competition, or trail ride, avoid sharing equipment, water or feed buckets as much as possible.
- Isolate your horse for a period of 7-14 days following the event, and report any signs of illness to your veterinarian immediately.

More information can be found at:

<http://www.aaep.org/ehv.htm>

<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/nahss/equine/ehv/>

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