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Dear Member of the Delaware Equine Industry,

I am writing to provide you with information concerning the recent diagnosis of **Contagious Equine Metritis (CEM)** in the USA and a short summary of the disease. The Delaware Department of Agriculture (DDA) has also sent a letter to Delaware equine veterinarians. Additional web-based reference material can be accessed on our website www.dda.state.de.us in the near future. Horse owners with specific questions pertaining to the health of their horses are encouraged to consult their private veterinarians.

CEM is a reportable foreign animal disease, and any suspect cases should be reported immediately to your veterinarian.

DELAWARE: There is presently no need for CEM testing of Delaware horses, beyond what may have been scheduled in support of routine commerce. Should your veterinarian determine that CEM testing is necessary for any reason, he/she should contact DDA and/or USDA veterinarians since there are specific USDA mandated testing protocols. Although we do not have an approved CEM laboratory in Delaware, the Maryland Department of Agriculture Lab is approved to conduct CEM diagnostics.

USA: On 15 December 08, the State of Kentucky detected a case of contagious equine metritis (CEM) in a quarter horse stallion on a premises in central Kentucky. Since then, a total of nine stallions have been confirmed as positive for CEM by USDA's National Veterinary Services Laboratories. As of 12 January 2009, the locations of 326 other exposed horses had been confirmed.

Please note that the definition of an **exposed horse** is *one that was on the index premises in Kentucky and/or one that was bred to a CEM-positive horse, either naturally or via artificial insemination, or as determined by State Animal Health Officials or APHIS officials.*

All CEM-positive horses, and all exposed horses that have been located are currently under quarantine or hold order. Testing and/or treatment protocols are being put into action for those horses. The investigation is in an early phase and the full extent of the problem will not be evident for some time. DDA is very confident in the abilities and diligence of the investigating agencies and their personnel.

What is Contagious Equine Metritis? CEM is an inflammation of the endometrium (uterine lining) of mares caused by the bacteria, *Taylorella equigenitalis*. It is a highly contagious, sexually-transmitted disease, which causes temporary infertility in the mare. Stallions can become carriers of the bacteria, but do not show clinical signs. Mares may also become carriers of the bacteria, never showing clinical signs. Only 40% of infected mares show abnormal vaginal discharge, abortion, or infertility. Foals born of carrier mares may also become carriers. The disease is resident in mares and transmitted by stallions during mating or teasing. The bacteria can also be spread via semen collected for artificial insemination.

Why is CEM such a huge deal? CEM does not affect other body systems in the horse, and is therefore not a life-threatening condition. The major impact of CEM is that the United States equine industry has lost its “CEM-free” status. This will affect international exports of horses, semen, and embryos. The value of exported live horses in 2007 (all breeds) was \$444 million. Over 90% of exports were sent to Mexico and Canada. The approximate value of exported semen and embryos for 2007 was \$7.7 million to \$19.3 million.

Can the CEM positive horses be treated? CEM can be treated with disinfectants and antibiotics. CEM-positive mares are required to go through a treatment protocol and remain in quarantine for no less than 21 days. Stallions that have CEM are required to remain quarantined until a treatment protocol is completed and they test negative for the disease.

Where did this outbreak of CEM originate? To date, a source has not been identified. The focus of the state and federal veterinarians’ efforts is conducting the trace forward to identify potentially exposed animals, so that additional spread can be minimized. There are at least 25 countries in the world where CEM has been identified in the native equid population (meaning horses, mules, donkeys, etc.). These countries include England, Ireland, France, Germany, and other member states of the European Union.

As of January 8, 2009, states that have announced they are testing exposed or at-risk horses include:

- Kentucky
- Indiana
- North Dakota
- Oklahoma
- Texas
- Virginia
- Colorado
- Montana
- Wisconsin

Thank you for your patience during this difficult time.

Best Regards,

Heather L Hirst, DVM MS

State Veterinarian