



Equine Herpes Myeloencephalopathy

Should I be worried?

Dr. Scott Weese, pathobiology professor in the University of Guelph's Ontario Veterinary College, and expert in veterinary infection control and zoonotic pathogens addresses this question:

Equine herpesvirus type 1 (EHV-1) is an important cause of disease in horses but it's also very common. A large percentage of, if not most, horses in Ontario are harbouring the virus, as it tends to live dormant in a horse's body after initial infection. Most horses are exposed when young and develop mild respiratory tract disease, after which they never have a problem. However, serious problems such as abortion and neurological disease can occur, both as individual sporadic cases or in clusters. Vaccination is highly effective at preventing abortions, but not necessarily neurological disease. Neurological disease can be devastating and it's still unclear why it develops in some horses.

When neurological disease caused by EHV-1 develops, efforts are made to contain the affected horse and contacts, to reduce the risk of transmission. However, the risk posed by EHV-1 is no different now than it was a week ago, or a year ago. The disease is rare but the risk is ever-present. The virus is in the horse population and will always be. That's why we focus on basic infection control and biosecurity measures, to reduce the overall risk of exposure and to limit exposure of high risk groups like pregnant broodmares. Reducing exposure of different horses, using good infection control practices when horses are mixed (e.g. at shows or sales), quarantine of new arrivals, and isolation of sick horses are basic practices that can likely have a major impact on the risk of EHV-1 transmission.

Further resources:

Infographic from Ontario Animal Health Network

<https://oahn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/OAHN-EHM-infographic-FINAL-.pdf>

Equine Guelph's Vaccination Equi-Planner

<http://www.equineguelph.ca/Tools/equipanner.php>

Equine Guelph's Biosecurity Risk Calculator

<http://www.equineguelph.ca/Tools/biosecurity.php>

