

Ask A Vet: Protect Your Horse from EIA

Sunday, October 6, 2013

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

I'm taking one of my horses to a sale this fall and I found out he needs a Coggins blood test. What disease does that test for and why is it required?

Dear Reader,

The Coggins test is a blood serum test for Equine Infectious Anemia. State and federal laws are in place to protect the equine industry from this devastating and incurable disease.

Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) is a potentially fatal disease that threatens the world's horse, donkey and mule populations. The virus that causes EIA reproduces in the white blood cells that circulate throughout the body. The immune system, via antibodies, may attack and destroy red blood cells, leading to anemia. Infected horses may die from the direct effects of the virus or from secondary infections. Despite testing and measures to eradicate the equine infectious anemia virus, EIAV, more than 500 new cases are identified each year in the U.S.

There is no cure for EIA. Although most horses show no symptoms, they remain contagious for life, endangering the health of other horses. For this reason, the United States Department of Agriculture and state animal health regulatory agencies require euthanasia or strict lifelong quarantine for horses testing positive for EIA.

Your horse's only protection against EIA is prevention. Good management practices can reduce the potential of infection. The following guidelines from the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) will help:

1. Use disposable needles and syringes, one per horse, when administering vaccines and medications.
2. Sterilize dental tools and other instruments before using them on another horse.
3. Test all horses for EIA at least annually.
4. Test horses at the time of purchase examination.
5. Stable owners, horse show and event managers should require and verify current negative Coggins certificates for all horses entering the premises.
6. New horses should be quarantined for 45 days and observed for any signs of illness, including elevated temperatures, before introducing them to the herd. They should be retested if exposure to EIA is suspected at a 45-day interval.

7. All stable areas should be kept clean, dry and waste-free. Good pasture management techniques should also be practiced. Remove manure and provide adequate drainage to discourage breeding sites for pests.

8. Horses at greater risk, such as those in frequent contact with outside horses or who live or travel in geographic regions known for EIA outbreaks, should be tested more frequently, every 4 – 6 months.

For more information about EIA, ask your equine veterinarian for “Equine Infectious Anemia: The Only Protection if Prevention,” a brochure provided by the AAEP in conjunction with Educational Partner Bayer Animal Health. Additional information can be found on the AAEP’s website www.aaep.org/horseowner.

-Dr. Jerry Sellon