

Equine Influenza

Clinical signs

- A very high proportion of exposed horses would be affected.
- Fever (to 41° C) develops after a 1-5 day incubation period.
- Coughing is frequent, dry and hacking during the first few days.
- Later becomes less frequent, more moist and stops after 1-3 weeks if horses are well rested.
- Nasal discharge that is initially clear but becomes mucous or thick.
- Affected horses are lethargic, easily fatigued and lose their appetite.
- Most recover completely within a couple of weeks, given good care and rest.
- May be some deaths in foal from pneumonia, especially if they don't get colostrum.
- Horses that are worked while sick may be susceptible to secondary bacterial bronchitis or bronchopneumonia.

Characteristics of the disease

- Rapidly spread by close direct contact between horses, via the respiratory route.
- Infected horses excrete the virus in their exhaled air before they show any signs and for up to 8 days after initial infection, but recovered horses do not become carriers.
- Coughing may project virus metres, and under favourable conditions wind could spread virus.
- Contaminated horse transport and other equipment can spread infection as the virus can survive in the environment for up to 36 hours and maybe longer.
- Outbreaks are most likely when horses are congregated together.
- In Australia's susceptible horse population an outbreak would spread explosively.

How is the virus transmitted?

It is a respiratory disease, so coughing, snorting over other horses (will transmit the virus) and people can be carriers for it as well. It doesn't live in the environment for a very long time so it's commonly horse to horse, but if a horse coughed or sneezed on your hands and you went and handled another horse, certainly a person could be a carrier.

Can it be prevented and treated?

Because it is a virus, there are no drugs that influence the outcome of the disease. However many horses develop secondary infections with bacteria that can lead to pneumonia and other problems. Good nursing care and if necessary, antibiotics to deal with bacterial illness associated with the disease are important parts of treatment.

Should I cancel my farrier/chiropractor/dentist/massage therapist?

Access to properties should only be allowed if the matter is an emergency. Where possible do not make arrangements for these types of visits until after the stock standstill has been removed.

Where visits do take place ensure appropriate disinfection occurs by the property owner and the visitor.

What about my feed delivery?

Non-essential vehicles and visitors must be prevented from entering areas of the premises that hold horses. Arrange whenever possible for collection and delivery of supplies to take place at the boundary of the premises.

Disinfection

Equine influenza virus can easily be killed by vigorous cleaning and disinfection of potentially contaminated hands, clothing and objects and is rapidly inactivated by exposure to ultraviolet light.

A dirty surface must always be cleaned thoroughly before it can be satisfactorily disinfected. Organic material such as dirt, manure and straw may neutralise the disinfectant and make it useless. It is therefore most important that anything that must be disinfected is first thoroughly washed and cleaned and finally washed down or sprayed with an approved disinfectant. Virkon® at a 1:100 dilution rate is the disinfectant of first choice for use on clothing, footwear, transport vehicles and equipment. Where bulk disinfection of stables and buildings is required, other chemicals may be more cost-effective.

For more extensive information go to www.dpi.nsw.gov.au

Equine Influenza Hotline - 1800 675 888