Kings Bounty Equine Practice Client Fact Sheet

Equine Influenza

What is Equine Influenza?

Equine Influenza virus is one of the most contagious diseases that affects horses and can be devastating in susceptible populations. We are often complacent about this disease because we expect horses to be vaccinated. However, should a major outbreak occur with a new virus strain then unvaccinated horses will suffer severe and potentially fatal disease and vaccinated horses may also be affected. Multiple small outbreaks happen every year in the UK, and major outbreaks have occurred before and may well happen again.

Incubation period

Following infection, the incubation period (the time taken for clinical signs to develop) is between three and five days.

The severity of the disease is variable depending upon the strain of the virus, the horse's immune system and the horse's vaccination status.

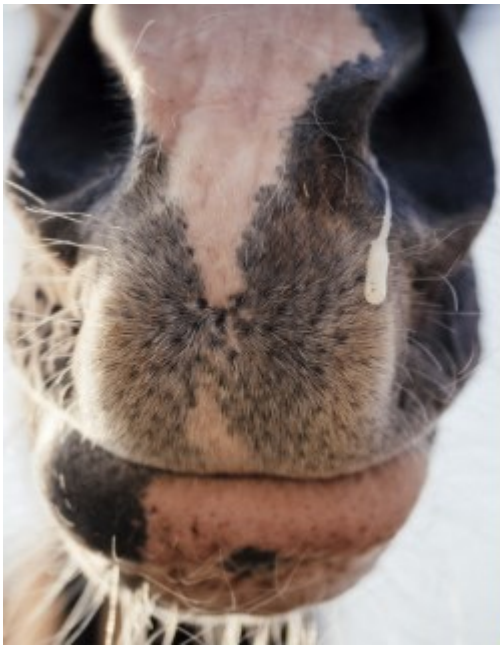
Once infection occurs the virus attacks the lining of the upper airways and prevents the normal drainage of secretions from the lungs. Fluid may collect in the lower airways and may become infected by bacteria, even giving rise to pneumonia.

Illness may last from two to ten days but complete recovery takes much longer and horses remain capable of spreading disease throughout the period during which they are sick.

In rare cases influenza may affect other body systems and cases of heart disease and meningitis have been reported.

Clinical signs

- Cough
- Nasal discharge
- A very high temperature (103°F to 105°F / 39.5°C to 40.5°C)
- Lethargy
- Reduced appetite or inappetence
- Depression
- Muscle soreness
- Reluctance to move



Kings Bounty Equine Practice Client Fact Sheet

Affected horses

Affected horses should be isolated immediately as this disease is highly contagious. There are no anti-viral drugs that are proven to benefit horses with influenza so treatment is essentially supportive and symptomatic. Anti-inflammatory drugs are important to bring the temperatures back to normal and also help reduce muscle soreness, improve comfort and encourage eating and drinking.

Some horses may stop drinking and supplementary oral or intravenous fluids may therefore be necessary.

Following infection it takes one to two months for the lining of the respiratory tract to repair and it is important that horses are rested throughout this time. It has been suggested that for every day the horse is sick with influenza and has a temperature, it should be given one week off to recover in order to prevent the risk of long-term lung damage or heart disease.

Influenza vaccination

Vaccinating is vital in protecting individual animals and preventing the spread of disease. To optimise protection in horses that are in high risk situations the vaccine can be used to mimic natural infection and can be given every six months after the initial course of three vaccinations.

Primary vaccination protocol (as per manufacturers guidelines):

1st equine influenza vaccination from 5 months of age

2nd vaccination required 4-6 weeks after the date of the 1st vaccination

3rd vaccination required 5 months after the date of the 2nd vaccination

Annual boosters are required thereafter with the last permissible day being the same date as the previous year's vaccination

Certain governing bodies (FEI, BHA, BD, BE, BS etc) may have differing guidelines and owners should be aware of the guidelines for their sport.

Remember, a horse's immunity will lower towards the end of the period when the next booster is due, so make sure not to miss it.

Horses competing under FEI rules must be vaccinated within 6 months and 21 days of entry to FEI stables. Horses are eligible to compete 7 days after the date of the 2nd vaccination under BHA, FEI and Pony Club rules.

Choosing not to vaccinate

When horses are retired or are no longer 'in contact' with other horses, some horse owners decide not to vaccinate against flu. However, it's important to remember that those horses will present a flu risk to other horses and ponies, as well as themselves.