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FAST FACTS ABOUT EQUINE INFECTIOUS ANEMIA (EIA, Swamp Fever)

DEFINITION

EIA IS A COMMUNICABLE (BUT NOT CONTAGIOUS) DISEASE THAT AFFECTS THE HORSE'S IMMUNE SYSTEM. BECAUSE EIA INFECTED HORSES REMAIN INFECTED FOR LIFE, POSING A THREAT TO OTHER HORSES, MOST STATES REQUIRE THAT TEST POSITIVE HORSES MUST BE QUARANTINED FOR LIFE OR EUTHANIZED. THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT REQUIRES THAT HORSES BEING IMPORTED FROM FOREIGN COUNTRIES TEST NEGATIVE TO THE COGGINS TEST AND EACH STATE HAS ITS OWN SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR EIA.

CAUSE

EIA IS CAUSED BY A *RETROVIRUS* THAT HAS A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS (HIV). EIA IS TRANSMITTED BETWEEN INFECTED AND UNINFECTED HORSES BY TRANSFER OF BLOOD VIA BLOOD-SUCKING INSECTS OR BY USE OF CONTAMINATED EQUIPMENT.

CLINICAL SIGNS

SYMPTOMS VARY FROM HORSE TO HORSE AND MIMIC OTHER DISEASES. SOME ANIMALS MAY DEMONSTRATE NO OBVIOUS SIGNS. SIGNS MAY INCLUDE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING: FEVER, DEPRESSION, DECREASED APPETITE, FATIGUE, RAPID BREATHING, SWEATING, WEIGHT LOSS, WEAKNESS, COLIC, SWELLING OF LEGS AND ABDOMEN.

DIAGNOSIS

DIAGNOSIS IS MADE BY USING ONE OF TWO APPROVED BLOOD TESTS – THE COGGINS TEST, OR AN ELISA TEST. ELISA MAY NOT BE AS ACCURATE AS THE COGGINS.

TREATMENT

THERE IS NO EFFECTIVE TREATMENT FOR EIA.

PROGNOSIS

THERE IS NO CURE FOR EIA. ALTHOUGH MOST INFECTED HORSES SHOW NO SYMPTOMS, THEY REMAIN INFECTIOUS FOR LIFE. THEY ARE UNABLE TO CLEAR THE VIRUS FROM THEIR BODIES AND THEREFORE, CONTINUALLY ENDANGER THE HEALTH OF OTHER HORSES.

PREVENTION

CONTROL MEASURES TO DECREASE CHANCES OF EXPOSURE TO EIA INCLUDE REQUIRING NEGATIVE TEST RESULTS FOR NEW ARRIVALS OR SHOW/EVENT PARTICIPANTS AND ANNUAL TESTS AS PART OF A HEALTH PROGRAM, FLY CONTROL, GOOD STABLE MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES (DISPOSABLE NEEDLES AND SYRINGES, CLEAN DENTAL INSTRUMENTS, NO SHARING OF BITS), AND PASTURE MANAGEMENT: (REMOVE MANURE AND PROVIDE ADEQUATE DRAINAGE TO DISCOURAGE BREEDING SITES FOR PESTS).

VACCINATION

THERE IS NO VACCINE CURRENTLY AVAILABLE TO PREVENT EIA. THE EIA VIRUS UNDERGOES CHANGES WITHIN THE HORSE MAKING VACCINE DEVELOPMENT DIFFICULT.

-Dr. Lyda W. Denney-