

12 MAY 2008

EQUINE INFLUENZA

CHIEF VETERINARY OFFICER COMMUNICATION # 29

URGENT FOR ALL VETERINARIANS

Reporting and investigating horses with signs indicative of Equine Influenza (EI)

Veterinary practitioners are at the front line in Australia's defence against exotic diseases. I am writing to you to enlist your continued support in the reporting and investigation of any horse/s showing signs consistent with possible EI, and to update you on how such reports will be handled.

Thanks to the combined efforts of all involved in the EI control and eradication campaign, NSW has now been declared provisionally free. However it has been agreed nationally that all suspected cases of EI must continue to be investigated. This requirement underpins both the national declaration of EI freedom proposed for 30 June 2008, and international recognition of our EI freedom proposed for 31 December 2008.

The nationally agreed case definition for EI is:

"Equine influenza is a respiratory disease of horses and other equidae that causes coughing, nasal discharge, depression, inappetance and fever of more than 38.5°C. In a single horse, a combination of these signs constitutes a suspect case."

The disease has a high morbidity and in groups of susceptible horses, a significant proportion is likely to be very rapidly affected.

Horses that are recently recovered are unlikely to be infected but can act as mechanical carriers of the virus. Horses that have been vaccinated can be infected, and infective, excreting small amounts of virus for several days after infection, as well as mechanical carriers of the virus, without necessarily exhibiting overt clinical signs."

All cases consistent with this definition should be reported via the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888. The hotline operators will record reported information. A DPI biosecurity veterinarian will assess the case and decide whether or not to task an investigation including sampling, normally of up to six 'at risk' horses. The owner's private practitioner will usually be the vet tasked to undertake the investigation and collect the samples. The collection, submission and laboratory costs associated with tasked investigations will be met as part of the disease response.

For further information on property visits to horses with signs consistent with possible EI (including sampling, biosecurity and sample submission) see:

<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/horse/influenza/information/vets/guidelines/guidelines-property-visits-vets>.

Laboratory samples must be dispatched promptly to EMAI.

Case histories should continue to be recorded on ANEMIS forms which may be downloaded from <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/horse/influenza/information/vets> and should be faxed immediately to SDCHQ on 02 6361 9976.

Property owners should be advised to implement appropriate biosecurity while awaiting laboratory results to ensure that the spread of any infection is limited.

If you don't have viral transport media try your local Rural Lands Protection Board office. Any transport media supplied by EMAI and kept frozen is fine to use. Expiry is not an issue.

Invoices for tasked investigations should be faxed to SDCHQ on 02 6361 9976, quoting the task request number.

Please remember that EI is a notifiable disease in New South Wales under both the Exotic Disease of Animals Act 1991 and the Stock Diseases of Animals Act 1923. Failure to notify a suspected case of EI carries a maximum penalty of \$22,000.

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (12 May 2008). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of New South Wales Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.