13 JUNE 2008

EQUINE INFLUENZA

CHIEF VETERINARY OFFICER COMMUNICATION # 30

URGENT FOR ALL VETERINARIANS

Equine Influenza (EI) sampling of horses for export

I would like to alert veterinary practitioners to the need for extreme care when collecting nasal swabs for EI PCR tests samples on horses that are destined for export.

The new PCR test for EI is highly sensitive and capable of detecting very small quantities of viral material. A swab contaminated with the viral material from the killed vaccine will produce a positive reaction on PCR testing.

If you are required to vaccinate a horse with killed vaccine and collect samples for PCR testing you must ensure that you follow protocols that prevent the swab being contaminated.

Ensure that you collect and store all testing samples before you handle the vaccine. Your hands and all clothing and equipment should be clean before you collect any samples. The samples should be placed directly into a dedicated, clean esky. Ensure that staff who pack the samples for dispatch to the laboratory, do not contaminate the samples and esky after handling discarded vaccination equipment and vials.

Now that Australia is provisionally free of EI it is vital that veterinary practitioners do not inadvertently cause alarm by false positive testing results from samples contaminated by carelessness.

Proteqflu vaccine permission

Please remember that the current AVPMA permit authorising the use of Proteqflu vaccine expires on 30 June 2008. If you have any vaccine stocks that will not be used by this date please arrange to return them to the distributor e.g. Provet, EFA.

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

Please remember to continue to report all cases of respiratory illness in horses consistent with the national case definition for EI below, to the Emergency Animal Disease Watch hotline on 1800 675 888.

“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℃. 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.”

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 continue 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.

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.
