

Equine specialist warns horse owners of dangerous virus

May 6 2014, by Lindsey Elliott

A Kansas State University equine specialist is warning horse owners of a highly contagious virus recently identified in Kansas and Wisconsin.

The Kansas Department of Agriculture [reports](#) that a horse in northeast Kansas has been confirmed positive with a wild type of non-neurotropic case of equine herpes [virus](#), or EHV-1. The agriculture department says the horse was previously at a large barrel-racing event in Lincoln, Nebraska, and that another horse from Wisconsin, which was at the same barrel-racing event, has been confirmed positive with EHV-1.

EHV-1 is a respiratory disease that is spread through the air, through horse-to-horse contact and by contact with [nasal secretions](#) on equipment, track, feed and other surfaces. Humans cannot get equine herpes virus, but they can spread the disease to other horses if the virus is on their hands, clothing, shoes or vehicle.

Beth Davis, professor and section head of equine medicine and surgery at Kansas State University's Veterinary Health Center, says horse owners need to check their horses for symptoms, especially if they have recently been to an equine event.

"If a horse has been at an event where there are a large number of horses and there was a case of equine herpes myelitis, keep an eye on that horse to make sure it is doing what it normally does," Davis said. "Take its temperature twice a day to make sure it has a normal temperature, which is around 100 degrees Fahrenheit."

Davis said the first sign of the virus is a fever greater than 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

"The horse may then resolve that fever, but in another day or two the horse will have another fever spike," Davis said. "Those may be the only clinical signs that the horse shows."

The horse may also develop signs of neurological disease, which are weakness, paralysis of the hind end, urinary dysfunction and the inability to stand.

"If you've been to one of these events where there has been a case of equine herpes myelitis, those horses that have been in contact with cases need to be quarantined for a period of 28 days," Davis said.

Most horses are latently affected, which means the virus is present in the horse's system and is associated with the neurological system. Davis says the immune system regulates control of the disease and horses that develop symptoms of the virus are typically immunosuppressed.

No vaccine is available for this form of equine herpes, but there are vaccines that can boost the horse's immune system to help fight the virus. It's important for horse owners to monitor their animals and notify their veterinarian with any concerns.

"Unfortunately, we can have extremely serious consequences and so we want to identify any at risk individuals," Davis said. "We want to minimize the spread because it is highly contagious and we want to try to avoid other [horses](#) getting sick."

Provided by Kansas State University

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