

Equine HEALTH REPORT

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West Nile Virus Report

Equine Industry Hard Hit by Epidemic

Horse owners and veterinarians are on alert as West Nile virus (WNV) has grown to epidemic proportions. By the end of September, 7,462 cases in 36 states were confirmed by the National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL). The death rate has yet to be estimated. In 2001, NVSL diagnosed 738 equine cases of WNV from 20 states, with a 33% death rate.

WNV is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito, and can infect people, horses, birds and other animals. The virus is located in the mosquito's salivary glands. During the "bloodmeal," the virus is injected into the blood system of the

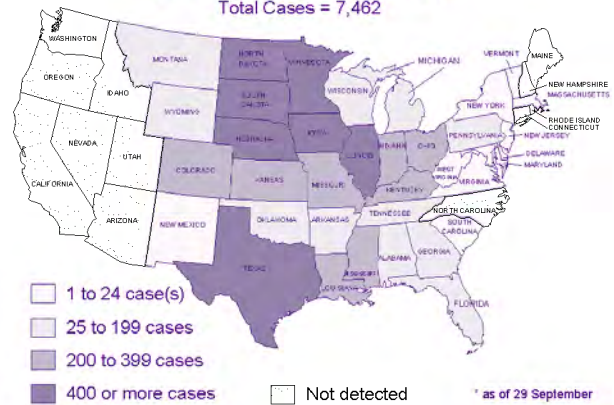
horse. It multiplies and may cause illness. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds or animals. Following transmission by an infected mosquito, the virus multiplies in the horse's blood system and crosses the blood brain barrier, infecting the brain. The virus interferes with normal central nervous system functioning and causes brain inflammation. There's no documented evidence of animal-to-person or horse to horse transmission.

"As this disease makes its way across the continental U.S., we're seeing an increasing number of WNV cases in horses," said Bobby Acord, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) administrator. "Our best estimates are that one in three WNV-affected horses will die. We're urging horse owners to take all available precautions against this disease."

Dr. Randall Crom, APHIS senior staff veterinarian for emergency programs, said with this epidemic, also known as an epizootic (epidemic in animals), "it's difficult for the NVSL to cope with the testing volume."

APHIS does not investigate every case of WNV. Many private practitioners are submitting specimens

West Nile Virus in 2002*
States with an Equine Case(s)
Total Cases = 7,462



for testing. APHIS does investigate severe cases of equine encephalitis to make sure they are not something more exotic, such as Venezuelan Equine Encephalomyelitis (VEE).

Prevention programs. Horse owners have been urged to protect their horses from WNV through use of an approved vaccine or other preventative measures.

Since the detection of the virus in the U.S. in 1999, USDA-APHIS worked to facilitate development of a WNV equine vaccine. APHIS' Center for Veterinary Biologics granted a conditional license for the distribution of the vaccine on Aug. 1, 2001. The equine vaccine is a killed virus product restricted to veterinarians.

The manufacturer of the vaccine recommends giving two intramuscular doses of 1 milliliter each, 3 to 6 weeks apart, followed by an annual booster. The booster should be

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Beeman, Timoney Lead Equine Health Committee

Dr. Marvin Beeman, an equine practitioner from Littleton, Colo., and a representative of the American Horse Council (AHC), has been appointed chairman of the Equine Health Committee of the National Institute for Animal Agriculture (NIAA).

Dr. Beeman serves on the AHC Board of Trustees. He also has served in leadership roles with the American Association of Equine Practitioners and the American Quarter Horse Association.

Appointed vice chairman is Dr. Peter Timoney, an internationally recognized veterinary scientist at the University of Kentucky in Lexington. Timoney is director of the Maxwell H. Gluck Equine Research Center in the UK Department of Veterinary Science.

In making the appointments, NIAA Board Chairman Kenneth Olson said, "We're fortunate to have individuals with their expertise and commitment to equine health issues to lead this committee."

NIAA's mission is to provide a forum for building consensus and advancing solutions for animal agriculture and to provide continuing education and communication linkages for animal agriculture professionals. Animal Health is one of

NIAA's primary areas of emphasis and Equine Health is one of 15 committees working within the organization. The chair and vice chair appointments are for a two-year term.



Photo courtesy of Littleton Veterinary Clinic

Dr. Marvin Beeman



Equine Health Report

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AAEP Horseman's Day Offers Interactive Equine Health Sessions

The American Association of Equine Practitioners' (AAEP) annual health seminar for horse owners, Horseman's Day, will be held on Sunday, Dec. 8 in Orlando, Fla. Designed for those interested in equine health care, Horseman's Day features leading veterinary experts delivering the latest news and advances in horse health.

Now in its third year, Horseman's Day offers six interactive sessions. The seminar is sponsored through the support of the AAEP's Educational Partners. Topics and speakers for the 2002 event are:

- *Equine Emerging Diseases: New Threats for Horse Owners*—Dr. Genevieve Fontaine, University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine, Gainesville.
- *Equine Gastric Ulcers*—Dr. Frank Andrews, University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine, Knoxville.
- *Breeding Your Mare Using New*

Reproductive Technologies—Dr. Michelle LeBlanc, Rood & Riddle Equine Hospital, Lexington, Ky.

• *Proper Physiological Horseshoeing*—Dr. Steve O'Grady, Northern Virginia Equine, The Plains, Va.

• *The Wonderful World of Colic*—Dr. Jack Snyder, University of California-Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, Davis.

• *Bits, Biting and Dentistry*—Dr. R. Dean Scoggins, University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine, Urbana.

Held in conjunction with the AAEP 48th Annual Convention, Horseman's Day's Sunday program is from 8 a.m. to 5:15 p.m. at the Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center. Pre-registration fee through Nov. 15 is \$45; on-site registration is \$60. For more information, visit AAEP's horse-health Web site, www.myHorseMatters.com, or call the AAEP office at 800-443-0177.

Equine Epidemic of 2002 —continued from page 1

given just prior to the start of the mosquito season in your area.

In addition, NVSL is assisting state labs by conducting primary and confirmatory testing of samples.

Many horse owners in the central and western regions of the country were caught unprepared for WNV's rapid spread. "Horse owners should be proactive in talking to their veterinarian about the possibility of vaccinating their horses," Dr. Crom said. The two-dose series of vaccine needs to begin at least 4-6 weeks before exposure to an infected mosquito for maximum protection.

"Although definitive reports on the outcomes of all these cases is somewhat lacking, there is nothing to suggest that the rate of death among horses with WNV illness is different this year than it was in the past three years," Dr. Crom said.

On the diagnostic front, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports some progress. Scientists have field tested the use of oral swabs from dead corvid birds, such as crows and jays.

"We've demonstrated that oral swabs work almost as well as kidney or brain tissue for diagnosing WNV infection in the dead bird, said Dr. Nick Komar of CDC's Arbovirus Diseases Branch, Fort Collins, Colo. "This revelation promises to streamline testing of avian carcasses, making it possible for state labs to process more dead birds than in previous years. A rapid 15-minute test applied to these oral swabs also is effective.

"The availability of this new rapid antigen-detection test will translate to enormous cost savings for the labs at the front line of surveillance activities," Dr. Komar said.

CDC research is finding that in the 2002 WNV epidemic, equine disease seems to occur more frequently relative to avian mortality in the west central states compared with the eastern states.

"This is bad news for horse owners who now have little or no early

warning of risk in the west central states," Dr. Komar said. "This apparent difference in the ecology of WNV in the West is probably due to the important role of *Culex tarsalis* as vector in the West. This species of mosquito feeds more predominantly on large mammals (and bird hosts) than do Eastern *Culex* mosquitoes."

Why the rapid spread? "The ability of WNV to become established in a new location depends on a complex ecology that takes into account the density of vector mosquitoes, competent reservoir bird species, incompetent hosts including immune animals, and climate," Dr. Komar said. "The virus was seeded throughout the Midwest in 2001, and conditions were appropriate for amplification in 2002. Draught apparently potentiates transmission, because it increases the suitability of standing water for breeding the important *Culex* vectors. Spread to the west of the Mississippi Valley in 2002 is not well understood. It may be that these areas were also seeded (but to a lesser degree) in 2001, and that WNV was only detected in 2002 once activity reached higher levels (by mid-August)."

WNV persists because of several factors. First, it's able to overwinter in adult *Culex* mosquitoes that go into hibernation. Secondly, it's able to be passed on from adult mosquito to a small proportion of progeny through the egg. Lastly, it may be able to persist in organs of live birds for long periods. "Whether persistent infections in birds can lead to reinfection of mosquitoes months later is as yet unknown," he said.

The peak of the equine WNV season has previously been in late September and early October. "Everyone should assume that West Nile virus will continue to spread rapidly and that all states in the continental U.S. will likely be affected," Dr. Crom said. "It's unlikely that West Nile virus will disappear from areas previously affected."

West Nile Virus Cases by State



As of Sept. 29, illness caused by West Nile virus infection has been reported by state officials in 7,462 equines from 36 states:

Alabama:	39
Arkansas:	64
Colorado:	296
Delaware:	1
Florida:	180
Georgia:	26
Illinois:	415
Indiana:	358
Iowa:	576
Kansas:	299
Kentucky:	328
Louisiana:	324
Maryland:	3
Massachusetts:	1
Michigan:	145
Minnesota:	642
Mississippi:	214
Missouri:	252
Montana:	99
Nebraska:	988
New Jersey:	13
New Mexico:	24
New York:	13
North Dakota:	553
Ohio:	246
Oklahoma:	73
Pennsylvania:	28
South Carolina:	2
South Dakota:	613
Tennessee:	79
Texas:	443
Vermont:	3
Virginia:	17
West Virginia:	3
Wisconsin:	45
Wyoming:	57

For the latest report go to:
www.aphis.usda.gov/oa/wnv

Equine ID Symposium Report

Working Group Outlines Needs, Challenges of ID

The first-ever, National Equine Identification Symposium was held July 28-30 in Chicago with approximately 125 people in attendance. The objective of the symposium, hosted by the National Institute for Animal Agriculture (NIAA), was to provide an educational forum for equine identification.

National and international experts addressed the benefits and challenges of implementing an equine ID system. Participants also heard presentations on electronic ID technology, smart card technology, and biometrics applications.

A working group made up of equine industry leaders met and conducted in-depth discussions on equine ID. The overall goal for this ID working group was to have participants at the symposium consider an ID system that (a) would not endorse a specific modality, but (b) would provide for unique and permanent alpha-numeric (computer-compatible) identification for each horse.

Participants shared their views about a potential national equine ID system, focusing on the positive aspects of such a system, issues to resolve, and how to proceed and carry out an ID plan.

While there were several positive aspects of a potential national equine ID system, such as traceability of horses, enhancement of trade, integrity of information and accurate census taking, there are several issues to resolve.

Participants agreed that the way to move forward is for interested parties to talk more about the issue and to study the possibility of implementing such a system and to do so in a deliberate but timely way.

NIAA will next convene a study group to determine a direction for a national

equine ID. It will give a report at the 2002 USAHA meeting in St. Louis. Concrete recommendations/action steps are then to be given at NIAA's next national meeting in April 2003.

ID of Positives and Issues

- Traceability of horses—This would allow owners, breed registries and government to track the movements of horses. It helps in cases of theft or loss, genetics and performance, plus disease tracking, control and eradication.

- Trade enhancement—Having key information tied to ID can help assure trading partners of genetics, performance and health. This can help increase the value of exports.

- Integrity of Information—An adequate ID system offers high levels of verification of ownership and performance. This prevents fraud, and helps in recovery of animals in cases of theft and natural disasters.

- Accurate Census—accurate ID can help with national census of animals by breed and location.

Issues That Need to be Resolved

Equine ID Symposium participants found some common themes that emerged from the discussions of the issues that would need to be

resolved before a potential national ID system could be put in place. These included the following:

- Standardization—Even though most breed registries and equine organizations require some sort of ID, harmonizing those systems into a national system that recognizes the needs of the registries and organizations without imposing significant additional requirements and costs will be challenging.

Participants in a second breakout session agreed that a national equine ID program should incorporate and build upon breed registries ID. One participant acknowledged that the industry is moving toward numerical coding of equines in addition to traditional ID methods (markings, photos, blood typing, DNA).

Another participant said breed registries have done a good job of identifying equines, but noted that the majority of recreational/pleasure horses are not registered. It was suggested that NIAA focus efforts on ways to reach this segment of the population, beginning with education programs on ID benefits.

- Privacy and access to data—If a national ID system is in place, it will need to meet multiple needs.

Limiting access to needed information while preventing access to sensitive information will be important in order to help make a national system work.

Everyone agreed that there are different levels of information and that there needs to be different levels of access. The group did not want any provisions for "data dumps" whereby information on all horses or owners would be available. The group wanted access limited to informa-

(continued on next page)



Participants at NIAA's Equine ID Symposium met in Chicago July 28-30 for in-depth discussion of ID issues.

Equine ID System Needs—continued from page 4

tion on a particular animal and limited to people with a legitimate need to know.

The database could start with information that is already public information, such as information from racing forms or certain health information. The group offered that the perspectives of owners that are not members of a breed or racing association may be different. If a national database with basic information is developed, breed associations can offer a second level of support or information.

The group offered the following areas where government regulatory agencies may have a reason to access data:

- Animal disease and health issues
- Ability to track animals in disease situations
- Animal census
- Proof of ownership/change
- ID of animals during transit.

Questions that need to be answered before an ID system is adopted include:

- What are assurances of privacy?
- How can it be assured that information on horses and owners will not be sold to advertisers, groups, or for other undesired purposes?
- Who will maintain the database?
- How will access to different parts of a database be decided?
- What does the government need or want in terms of basic data?
- Needs of backyard owners?

The cost/benefit factor

A national ID system will not happen without some additional cost. Who will pay and how the money will be collected are challenges to such a system.

Some participants are not sure that there is enough interest in a national ID system. There would have to be incentives for horse

owners and horse organizations to participate. Without incentives, a mandate or requirement by the equine industry(s) or by state or federal government will be needed.

Participants in the breakout sessions on costs agreed that it would be difficult to address costs issues such as who would pay and how payment would occur. Before cost issues can be addressed, it would be important to determine what the ID system would look like.

Most NIAA Equine ID Symposium participants agreed that there would be three key steps to begin working on a potential national ID system:

1. Create a committee to talk about the issues surrounding a potential national ID system
2. Conduct a feasibility study
3. Run pilot projects as needed.

—J. Amelita Facchiano

Viewpoint:

AHC Researches ID Mandates

Since joining the American Horse Council in 1987, I have followed the issue of equine identification. I've participated in many, many meetings with Dr. Knowles, Dr. Halstead, Dr. Zirkle and Dr. Cordes and many others on the advancements of ID technology for use in horses, such as smart card and the electronic chip.

Are the industry's needs being met? How would a uniform method of ID benefit the horse industry any more than ID methods already in place?

Would new technology benefit the industry more than current

ID methods? Can new technology be applied to the backyard horse without federal or state mandate?

In the past few years, the ID issue has been spurred by the belief that the WTO requires signatory nations to develop a national ID system for its livestock. The horse industry also would have to develop a national ID system. Recently, an important member of the horse industry asked for the actual language from WTO that mandates a national animal ID system.

An Internet search returned several hits, none of which included actual language of the WTO. A word search was done of the WTO's 15,000 documents. Not one document was found to contain the terms, "livestock identification" or "animal identification".

Further investigation revealed

that the issue of animal ID finds its origin in beef labeling in the EU. The EU sent a notice to the WTO that its own beef labeling with animal origin requirements would be a technical barrier to those countries wishing to trade with the EU. The EU essentially said that if countries want to do business with them, they must abide by their standards or have equivalent standards in place. As a result, countries that rely heavily on exports of animal products are scurrying to implement ID and traceability standards that meet the EU requirements for import.

So, at this point, there is no mandate for a national ID system. This means that where the industry goes from here is up to it. If you find benefit in the concept, then let's pursue it. —Amy Mann

AAEP Perspective:

Equine ID System 'Should be Industry Decision'

What is good for the individual horse is always good for the owner, the breed registries, and the entire equine industry. As clinical practitioners, we are involved daily in the identification of individual horses for the purposes of issuing health certificates, controlling contagious diseases and application of invasive permanent ID devices. The impact of ID on the commercial side of the industry as well as its impact on equine transport is also extremely important.

The American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) has no doubt that if the decision is made to require permanent ID of all horses in the United States, the equine veterinarian will be intimately involved with the day-to-day application and enforcement of the policy.

We have all been confronted with the solid bay gelding with no markings or distinguishable hair whorls or cowlicks. There must be tens of thousands of them across the country. We've also used and observed the many ID systems traditionally used in horses that include color, markings, age and sex; lip tattoos; brands, both hot and cold; trichoglyphs (whorls or cowlicks); microchips; blood typing; and DNA testing. Various

breed registries or regulatory agencies embrace at least one or more of these systems. All have their strengths and weaknesses.

We also are aware that new ID systems using iris or retinal biometrics technology have been developed for human identification and are being researched for animals. Because of the advances that could potentially occur in the future of animal ID, it would be erroneous for the equine veterinary community to collectively endorse one system over another at this time.

However, before a discussion of the various systems can be undertaken to determine which will best meet the needs of the horse industry, we believe that it's imperative that we determine why permanent ID is needed. Is it to prevent theft, to identify the animal for the purposes of health and disease control, fraud prevention, or owner ID in the case of natural disasters? Theft is best prevented by an outwardly obvious, permanent sign of ownership, such as a freeze brand.

ID of individual animals, proof of parentage, or ownership may involve any one or a combination of modalities. From a veterinary perspective, we believe the ideal equine ID system should be:

- Permanent
- Unalterable
- Established soon after birth
- Lasts the entire lifetime of animal
- Non-invasive
- Universally read

The AAEP believes the selection of any individual device or system should be an industry decision. The breed registries must be heavily involved as they represent the majority of horse owners and will be responsible for implementing the system for registry purposes. Governmental and regulatory agencies concerned with national and international travel of horses as well as the tracking of disease exposure must ensure that the system is user friendly, simple and inexpensive. Veterinary practitioners must be involved in the process because we will be using the various methods daily and explaining to the horse owner during the implementation process the reasons for and reasoning behind selection of the various modalities.

In an effort to protect our nation's agricultural resources and to create a streamlined horse ID system, AAEP supports the concept of a national equine ID system.

—Dr. Tom Lenz, AAEP

More Viewpoints from Equine ID Symposium

"Permanent identification of horses, along with proper security measures, is a horse owner's best bet for theft deterrence. More than risk management, equine ID is responsible horse ownership."

When reviewing the motivation, cause and effect of horse theft prevention, the conclusion is clearly that one and even several methods of ID will best serve the horse, the owner and law enforcement individuals most likely to recover missing/stray animals."

—J. Amelita Facchiano
Global VetLink, LC

"New technology has been offered up and the age of computers has added a new dimension to animal identification."

—Dr. Ralph Knowles
Veterinary consultant

"In major emergencies or natural disasters, identification saves time, money, lives, and offers peace of mind."

—Dr. Venaye Reece
Clemson University

"Identification of horses involved in Louisiana's equine infectious anemia (EIA) program provides definitive identification of horses tested and reduces abuses to the program. It also reduces laboratory error, provides definitive ID of test-positive horses for retesting, and provides a test history for individual horses—no matter the owner. Law enforcement agencies have used ID to solve theft cases."

—Dr. Maxwell Lea
Louisiana Department of Agriculture

Health Precautions Taken for Breeders' Cup

Extra biosecurity measures are in place for the 18th running of the Breeders' Cup Championship. This year-end international showcase of top Thoroughbred racing stars is scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 26 at Arlington Park in Chicago.

A team of veterinary health and race track officials is working 24/7 to ensure that all the Thoroughbred horses stay healthy and are secure.

The Illinois Department of Agriculture, under the leadership of State Veterinarian Dr. Richard Hull, and USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Services (APHIS-VS), under the leadership of Dr. Enzo Campagnolo, area veterinarian in charge, will be working together to monitor foreign horses coming to Chicago for the Breeders' Cup races. Some 40 international horses are expected to be entered in the eight-race event.

The planning process began 18 months ago for Dr. Hull and Arlington Park management.

Upon arrival at O'Hare International Airport, the horses will be examined by Dr. Craig E. Bovard, USDA, APHIS, VS's liaison with Breeders' Cup and Arlington Park, Dr. Mohammad U. Khan, Port Veterinarian or Dr. Andrea C. Bovard, Port Veterinarian. The shipping crates will be cleaned and disinfected under USDA supervision once horses are removed. Contents of the shipping crates will be treated as restricted garbage and incinerated. The horses will be vanned

directly to Arlington Park from the airport. The race track has three quarantine barns with the capacity to hold imported horses.

"These barns are fully screened and will have guards at their entrances 24 hours a day," Dr. Hull said. "The guards will limit the entry of people to Illinois Department of Agriculture employees, USDA



Chicago's Arlington Park is host of the 2002 Breeders' Cup races.

employees, and grooms who care for the horses."

At Arlington Park, the horses will have their hooves cleaned and will be required to walk through a foot bath. Once in the barn, the horses will have blood samples drawn for dourine, glanders, piroplasmiasis and EIA testing. The horses will remain in the quarantine barns until negative results are received from the National Veterinary Services Laboratories in Ames, Iowa.

Vans used to transport the horses between O'Hare International Airport and Arlington Park will be cleaned and disinfected under USDA supervision. Upon receipt of negative test results, the horses will be allowed to train on the track.

"Horses that enter the U.S. from Europe with incomplete swabs for

Contagious Equine Metritis will only be allowed outside the quarantine barn under Illinois Department of Agriculture or USDA supervision," Dr. Hull said. "This is to ensure that there is no direct contact between untested and known negative horses. Veterinarians or animal health technicians from Illinois Department of Agriculture or USDA will be at Arlington Park 24 hours per day while CEM waiver horses are present."

West Nile virus prevention. Protecting resident horses and race entries stabled at Arlington Park from WNV has been another big job for officials and veterinarians. Illinois recorded 415 cases of WNV by Sept. 29. The track has implemented a year-round mosquito prevention program of spraying, placing larvicide in standing water

areas, plus cleaning of drains and lagoons. The quarantine barns have protective screens on all doors and windows.

Because WNV vaccine is under conditional licensing by USDA-APHIS, neither domestic nor international race horses are required to be vaccinated. "But a high percentage of the 2,000 horses stabled at Arlington Park have been vaccinated," Dr. Hull added.

Arlington Park's team of veterinarians have plenty of experience when it comes to protecting the health of race horses, as it has handled many international entries in its "Million Dollar" racing series.

"I'm confident that Arlington Park has a good biosecurity plan in place and the Breeders' Cup races will go smoothly," Dr. Hull said.

Quick Draw: *Make Sure Horse Looks Like Its Photo*

Like most folks, you probably detest your driver's license photo, but, in all likelihood, the identification card resembles you (albeit on a bad day). Similarly, a horse's test document for equine infectious anemia (EIA) also is used for identification, and the drawing on this USDA form, called a VS 10-11, should look like the animal.

"The VS 10-11 form is to be presented when horses, mules, donkeys or other equids are sold, or are entered into shows, fairs, trail rides, or, since July 1 in Texas, when the animals are used on a public trail. This federal document (Coggins test) is proof that the animal has been tested for the disease EIA," said Rick Smathers, director of Program Records at the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC).

Accredited private veterinarians test animals for EIA by collecting a small sample of blood from the animal and submitting it to a labo-

ratory approved by USDA. Texas has 90 approved EIA testing labs.

Recently, an event official turned away a horse because the drawing on the VS 10-11 didn't resemble the animal being presented. Important aspects of its appearance hadn't been sketched or noted on the document, so the event official didn't consider it to be a match.

Smathers explained that the VS 10-11 is printed with an outline of a horse, and the accredited veterinarian issuing the document is to sketch or note any of the animal's spots, markings, stockings, hair whorls or scars or brands.

"Take a moment now to ensure that your animal's VS 10-11 is filled out accurately and completely," Smathers said. "Be sure you could identify your animal by looking at the form. If identifying characteristics have been omitted, visit with your veterinarian about having a revised document issued."

More than 152,000 horses in Texas have been tested for EIA in 2002, and each animal must have its own VS 10-11. "With so many forms being filled out, it's understandable that an error could be made on rare occasions. That's why the owner needs to double-check the form for accuracy," he said.

EIA affects only members of the equine family, such as horses, donkeys and mules, and is an incurable virus. The virus may be spread from infected equids to 'clean' animals when blood-to-blood contact is made, an event that occurs when biting flies travel from one animal to the next, or when contaminated instruments, such as hypodermic needles or dental floats, are used.

USDA-APHIS reported that in its fiscal year 2002, 452 horses tested positive for EIA nationwide. Top 4 states: Texas, 126; Arkansas, 76; Oklahoma, 60; and Louisiana, 42.

Source: TAHC

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