

EQUINE INFLUENZA (EI)

Equine Influenza (EI) is an exotic viral disease of horses. All Equidae (ie horses, donkeys, mules and zebras) are susceptible and the features of the disease are similar.

The disease occurs widely throughout the world and Australia and New Zealand were the only two countries with significant horse populations that had been free of it. This recent reported outbreak in Australia is of great concern to both our industries.

EI is a highly contagious disease that is transmitted directly from acutely infected to susceptible horses. Horses with the disease remain infectious for up to 7-10 days. No carrier state has been demonstrated.

The virus is present in the aerosol created by coughing horses and spread over 32 metres has been recorded. Longer -distance aerosol or windblown transmission has been suggested as a possibility. Transmission by in contact people, contaminated vehicles and equipment have contributed to the rapid and widespread distribution of the disease in many outbreaks.

The disease has a very short incubation period (time from infection to symptoms) of 1-5 days and clinical signs usually resolve in 1-3 weeks.

The disease starts with a high fever (often 40-41 degrees C). Animals are often depressed, off their food, are stiff and reluctant to move. The predominant clinical sign is a dry unproductive, explosive cough. Nasal discharge may be absent or clear in the early part of the disease, later becoming mucoid. While a large number of horses may become infected, especially in a very naive population such as ours, only a small number will die, usually due to secondary complications.

The New Zealand Equine Health Association is urging all horse people who have had horses arrive from Australia in the last few weeks to check them and their paddock mates for any of the above symptoms. If you have any concerns contact your local veterinary surgeon or phone the

EXOTIC DISEASE AND PEST EMERGENCY HOTLINE at 0800 809 966

Very recent arrivals should be kept isolated and their status checked. Generally the clinical signs are sufficient to base a diagnosis on but these need to be confirmed with laboratory tests.

As of midday today (Saturday 25th August) all horse imports from Australia have been stopped. Should the disease arrive here and depending how quickly it is diagnosed we will be faced with undertaking the same measures as Australia of stopping all horse movement for at least 30 days.

Mr Bruce Graham
Chair
NZ Equine Health Association