

AT A GLANCE

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Equine Influenza

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Equine influenza (EI) is a highly contagious respiratory disease that affects horses, donkeys, mules, and zebras.

Clinical signs can include:

- ◆ Fever;
- ◆ Malaise;
- ◆ Nasal discharge; and
- ◆ Cough.



The virus that causes EI is spread via saliva and respiratory secretions from infected horses. Horses are commonly exposed by:

- ◆ Horse-to-horse contact;
- ◆ Humans picking up the virus on their hands, shoes, or clothes and spreading the disease—this includes farriers, horse trainers, and veterinarians;
- ◆ Barn pets, such as dogs or cats, who like humans act as “fomites,” picking up the virus on their paws or body and spreading it from one horse to another (In this scenario, the pets aren’t contracting the virus, getting sick, and spreading disease.);
- ◆ Tack, buckets, or other equipment; and
- ◆ Aerosol transmission from coughing and sneezing.



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virus on their paws
or body

Definitions You Need to Know

Fomites • Objects or materials that are likely to carry infection.

Herd Immunity • The resistance to the spread of a contagious disease within a population that results if a sufficiently high proportion of individuals are immune to the disease, especially through vaccination.

Viremia • The presence of viruses in the blood.

Virus • An infective agent that typically consists of a nucleic acid molecule in a protein coat; is too small to be seen by light microscopy; and is able to multiply only within the living cells of a host.

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Outbreaks occur when transient horses come together at shows, clinics, race meets, trail rides, and other events.

- ◆ **Horses under stress**, such as that caused by travel or competition, are more likely to get sick if exposed.
- ◆ **Young horses and geriatrics** are more susceptible to contracting EI and suffering more serious complications than healthy adult equine populations.
- ◆ **Vaccination** is an important and inexpensive way to protect your horse from influenza. Herd immunity is especially helpful to protect groups of horses.

Because of this, US Equestrian requires proof that horses have had an EI (as well as rhino) vaccination within the six months prior to attending organization-sanctioned competitions or events.

A horse's cough can spread EI virus more than 40 feet

Equine influenza is a regulated disease, meaning U.S. veterinarians must report cases to their state veterinary offices. The World Organisation of Animal Health (OIE) monitors EI cases on a global level.

In addition to vaccination, other ways to protect your horse include quarantining new equine arrivals at barns, disinfecting buckets and equipment, and preventing nose-to-nose contact between horses. Consider monitoring your horse's health at shows by taking his **temperature** daily.

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Treatment generally involves supportive care, fever management using veterinarian-prescribed NSAIDs, and rest. This can lead to significant negative economic impacts, especially at racing and show stables during outbreaks.

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¹ Cortese V, Hankins K, Holland R, Syvrud K. Serologic responses of West Nile virus seronegative mature horses to West Nile virus vaccines. *J Equine Vet Sci*. 2013;33:1101-1105.

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