

For Immediate Release

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EIA Confirmed in Gallatin County Horse

A horse south of Gallatin Gateway has been diagnosed with the state's first case of Equine infectious anemia (EIA) since 2007.

Also known as swamp fever, EIA is potentially fatal viral disease of equines spread by biting insects like horse and deer flies that feed on blood. No vaccine or treatment exists for the disease, which is characterized by intermittent fever, depression, progressive weakness, weight loss, edema (fluid under the skin or in body cavities) and anemia.

The infected horse was discovered when a Coggins test – a screening test required for equine movement into or out of the state – was performed for out-of-state movement. The test was positive, and was confirmed by the USDA-APHIS National Veterinary Service Laboratories (NVSL) in Ames, Iowa. A new sample has been drawn and submitted to NVSL, with results due early next week. Follow-up testing on two other horses located at the premise is also underway.

Dr. Marty Zaluski, state veterinarian, said the Department of Livestock has been on-site investigating how the horse became infected.

"It's pretty early in the insect season, so we're not sure when the horse was infected," he said. "We'll have more information as the investigation continues."

Owners of infected horse have few options, which include euthanasia or a lifetime quarantine with a minimum of 200 yards distance between the quarantined animal and other equines. Infected animals can also be used for research; some scientists believe such research would contribute to a better understanding of retroviruses such as EIA, AIDs (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) and Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), as well as for developing an EIA vaccine.

Zaluski said the owner of the infected horse is currently considering options.

Testing of some neighboring equines will be required, Zaluski said.

EIA is endemic in the Americas, parts of Europe, the Middle and Far East, Russia, and South Africa. Hot zones in the U.S have historically been located east of the Mississippi River, but the disease has been spreading west. The advent of testing has helped curb spread of the disease in the U.S.; the percentage of test-positive animals has dropped from nearly 4 percent in 1972 to less than 0.01 percent in 2005.

Although biting insects are the primary cause of infection, EIA can also be transmitted through contaminated surgical equipment, and from mares to foals via placenta. Some infected equines do not show typical signs of the disease, and serve as inapparent carriers of the disease.

MDOL recommends regular EIA testing as part of a sound equine health management program, especially when horses have been in contact with animals of unknown EIA status. In addition, having

horses tested prior to purchase is highly recommended. Best management practices for prevention include insect control, and making sure no common needles or instruments are used.

"As with all livestock diseases, working with your veterinarian is the best place to start," Zaluski said. "This is especially the case for EIA, which can be difficult to differentiate from other fever-producing diseases like influenza and equine encephalitis."

Equines that suffer weight loss accompanied by a periodic fever, or groups of horses that develop EIA-like symptoms after the introduction of a new horse into the herd, should be tested as soon as possible. Veterinary consultation should also be sought for any equine that dies of unknown causes.

EIA is a federally reportable disease, although no USDA-APHIS eradication program exists because of its low incidence.

For additional information about EIA or testing requirements, please contact MDOL's Animal Health Division at 406/444-2043. Additional information is also available at:

- USDA-APHIS EIA information http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/animal_diseases/eia/
- USDA-APHIS monitoring & surveillance <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/nahss/equine/eia/index.htm>
- USDA-APHIS fact sheet http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/nahss/equine/eia/eia_info_sheet.pdf