

## *Client Factsheet #4: Equine Herpes*

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### **What is equine herpes?**

Equine herpes is a series of disease processes caused by the equine herpes virus family. There are five strains of the virus, which cause different diseases. These are referred to as EHV 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

- EHV 1 is the most common of the equine herpes viruses. It can cause respiratory disease in young horses. It can cause abortion in pregnant mares, which can result in outbreaks of abortions on stud farms. It can also cause paralysis. This can affect horses of any age and type.
- EHV 4 is the second most common of the equine herpes viruses. It causes low-grade respiratory disease and can occasionally cause abortion in pregnant mares.
- EHV 2 is occasionally seen to cause respiratory disease in horses, but it is very rare.
- EHV 3 causes a disease called equine coital exanthema, which is benign, self-limited, and transmitted between stallions and mares during mating.
- EHV 5 can occasionally cause a severe lung disease known as multinodular pulmonary fibrosis, but it is very rare.

### **How will I know if my horse has herpes?**

The clinical signs of herpes depend on which form the disease takes.

- Respiratory disease: this can be EHV 1, 4 or more rarely 3 or 5. Typically there will be a mild nasal discharge with occasional coughing and a low fever.
- Reproductive disease: this can be EHV 1, 3 or more rarely 4. If it is EHV 1 or 4, there may be sudden abortions. There may also be alive but infected foals that are weak and jaundiced at birth and often die within 72 hours. If it is EHV 3, there may be swellings and pustules around the horse's genitalia.
- The neurological form of the disease can present as anything from a mild wobbliness (known as ataxia) to being totally paralysed. It is associated with increased stabling time and low UV light exposure. It may be sudden in onset or it may follow from the respiratory or reproductive forms.

### **Is there any treatment for herpes?**

Herpes is a virus and as such there is no treatment for it. Cases of severe respiratory disease may require treatment with antibiotics if there is a secondary bacterial infection. Outbreaks of abortion, respiratory or neurological disease must be carefully managed to prevent the disease spreading around the yard; this can be achieved by good hygiene and isolating infectious horses. Equine coital exanthema, the form of the disease caused by EHV 3, is self-limiting, but affected horses should not be mated.

### **Can herpes be prevented?**

Herpes can be prevented by good management of horse used for breeding and vaccination. The virus is more likely to spread when horses are in close proximity, so keeping horses at higher risk (e.g. young horses, broodmares) in small groups which are physically distant from each other is a good system to prevent spread of the disease. The vaccine consists of 2 doses 1 month apart for the initial course and a booster should then be given every 6 months.