



Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
CHARLES H. BRONSON, Commissioner
The Capitol • Tallahassee, FL 32399-0800
www.doacs.state.fl.us

DISEASE ALERT

August 15, 2008

Dear Practitioner:

A 7 year old gelding was admitted to an Ocala veterinary hospital on Monday August 11th, for treatment of illness of 3 weeks duration. Due to the horse having clinical signs and preliminary testing at the University of Florida, College of Veterinary Medicine suggestive of EP, the State Veterinarian's Office was contacted on August 13th. Additional samples from this animal were forwarded to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL), who confirmed this animal as positive for Equine Piroplasmiasis.

Equine Piroplasmiasis (EP) is a blood-borne parasitic disease which is caused by two organisms, *Theileria equi* (formerly *Babesia equi*) and *Babesia caballi*. It is primarily transmitted to horses by ticks; however, the disease can be spread mechanically from animal to animal by contaminated needles. The disease was eradicated from Florida in the 1980's and the tick species generally believed to transmit this disease in other countries have not been identified in Florida in many years. This disease is not directly contagious from one horse to another but requires direct blood transfer. Human infection with equine piroplasmiasis is extremely rare.

Acutely affected horses can have depression, fever, anemia, jaundiced mucous membranes and low platelet counts. Equine Piroplasmiasis can also cause horses to have roughened hair coats, constipation, and colic. In its milder form, Equine Piroplasmiasis causes horses to appear weak and show lack of appetite. Some horses become chronic carriers of the disease.

As EP is considered a foreign animal disease and is reportable in Florida, we are asking veterinarians to report any horses suspect for the disease. Reporting can be done Monday-Friday 8:00am-5:00pm by calling (850) 410-0900 or faxing to (850) 410-0915. After hours reporting may be done by calling (800) 342-5869 or via email to rad@doacs.state.fl.us. Veterinarians should also collect ticks found on horses and then contact their respective Division district office for pick up. See the attached information or visit the Division home page (link below) and click on "Division of Animal Industry Map" for the district office locations and phone numbers.



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Further diagnostics and investigation are ongoing to determine possible sources for the disease introduction and whether this disease has spread beyond the premises of origin and if so, how the spread may have occurred. The positive premises is under quarantine pending the results of additional testing and investigation. Two adjacent premises with horses have also been quarantined pending a determination of their status.

Currently there are no new movement restrictions on horses within Florida or between Florida and other states. Horses entering Florida from other countries with Equine Piroplasmiasis will continue to be tested prior to and following entry according to the current rule.

Recommendations for Your Equine Clients:

- ✓ Monitor your horse for the presence of ticks. Use commercially available topical products labeled for ticks if your horse is in an area where tick infestation is a problem. Most of these products are synthetic pyrethrins. Include an avermectin product in your deworming program to provide systemic treatment for ticks. Ask your veterinarian if you are unsure.
- ✓ If you find large numbers of ticks or suspect piroplasmiasis, please contact your veterinarian.
- ✓ Do not share needles between animals during the administration of any medication or vaccinations. EP and other diseases can be spread by the introduction of blood cells from an infected animal into an uninfected animal during routine administration of injectable medications.
- ✓ Continue your normal equine activities.

Additional updates and information will be posted to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Animal Industry web site at:
<http://www.doacs.state.fl.us/ai/>.

Sincerely,

CHARLES H. BRONSON
COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE



Michael Short, D.V.M.
Equine Program Manager