CLEMSON EXTENSION

LL 47 March 1992 HORSES

Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA)

Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) is sometimes called swamp fever. It is an acute or chronic viral disease of horses. The disease is found wherever there are horses.

TRANSMISSION

In acute cases, the virus is in all tissues and discharges. The virus persists in the white blood cells of infected horses for life. It is stable in the presence of serum but is readily inactivated by common disinfectants that contain detergent.

Transmission is by transfer of blood cells from an infected horse. The disease may spread in epidemic form from obviously ill horses when bloodsucking insects are abundant. These will probably be horseflies, but mosquitoes may also transmit the disease. Contaminated needles or surgical instruments also transmit the virus, and stomach tubes that have blood on them have been implicated as a means of transmission of EIA. The incubation period ranges from 1 to 3 weeks but may be as long as 3 months.

CLINICAL FINDINGS

The disease is characterized by intermittent fever, depression, progressive weakness, loss of weight, edema, and progressive or transitory anemia. It tends to become an inapparent infection but occasionally results in death. The disease may be acute, chronic, or inapparent.

DIAGNOSIS

The clinical diagnosis of EIA should be confirmed by the Coggins test, which is an immuno-diffusion test. The ELISA test is also an official test. EIA should be suspected if a horse has a history of weight loss accompanied by periodic fever, if several horses in a group develop similar signs following the introduction of new animals into a herd, or if a horse on pasture dies.

TREATMENT

There is no specific treatment or vaccine available. General supportive therapy may help in an individual case. An infected horse, especially one exhibiting clinical signs, should be considered a likely source of infection for other horses. Whenever a diagnosis is established, the infected horse should be promptly isolated from other horses at least 200 yards. It should be maintained in isolation for life. Inapparent infected horses are safe for slaughter and human consumption of the meat. Stabling of carriers during the fly season helps prevent spread of the disease.

Foals born to infected mares frequently become infected in utero or postnatally, especially if the dams show clinical illness. All foals of infected dams must be isolated from other horses until freedom from infection can be determined by a negative Coggins test. Maternal antibodies will disappear after 6 months of age.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Test all incoming horses for EIA.
2. Euthanasia is advised for all horses positive to the confirmatory Coggins test or they should be sent to slaughter.
3. Retest horses annually in an endemic area.

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