Equine Infectious Anaemia Outbreak – Hungary

An outbreak of Equine Infectious Anaemia (EIA) has recently occurred in Hungary.

In March 2015, a diagnosis of EIA was made in a horse from Veszprém (HUN) that had been treated for an ethmoidal (nasal) haematoma in a veterinary clinic. The infected horse was euthanased.

All horses that had been in-contact with the infected horse were identified, quarantined and were tested every 21 days for 90 days. Five horses that had been in-contact with the blood of the infected horse tested positive and were euthanased. No further horses have tested positive.

Unrelated to the outbreak, Hungary’s national mandatory testing programme has revealed that four horses have returned inconclusive results. Further testing is taking place to establish their disease status and the horses have been placed into quarantine as a precaution.

The positive cases identified in the monitoring programme have concerned only leisure horses. Competition horses have not been affected.

EIA in Hungary

EIA can be found world-wide and in 2015, cases have been reported in a number of European countries, including Hungary.

Although Hungary has been free from EIA between 1965 and 2010, there have been 21 cases of the disease over the past five years. However, only one case had been identified this year prior to the outbreak described above.

It is mandatory to report all positive cases to the Hungarian Veterinary Authority, which will subsequently issue advice to stakeholders.

Regular, compulsory testing of horses for EIA takes place in Hungary to identify asymptomatic carriers of the disease and infected horses are euthanased. Testing of competition horses takes place annually and every three years for non-competition horses. This is a more stringent testing protocol than in other parts of Europe.

What is being done by Hungarian Authorities to control and prevent the spread of EIA?

In view of the outbreak, the Hungarian Veterinary Authority has imposed stricter regulations concerning the testing of horses for EIA. Restriction zones of three-kilometre radius have been implemented around stables where infected horses have been identified. The restriction zones will remain in place for a period of 90 days and all horses in these areas will undergo testing every three weeks.

FEI Events in Hungary

As of 15 June 2015, there have been no new cases of EIA. The FEI has been in constant communication with the National Head Veterinarian of Hungary and has analysed the risk of the disease in relation to the events planned in the region on an event-by-event basis.
Some concerns have been raised by National Federations regarding the CSIO3*-W-NC due to take place from 16-19 July 2015 in Budapest. The event is located in the centre of Budapest, which is 25 kilometres from a restriction zone, and a considerable distance away from potential risk areas, such as other equestrian establishments, pasture used for grazing and natural water sources. No infected horses have been on the site, and the venue will be free from all other horses for at least two weeks prior to the event. All stables will be thoroughly cleaned, disinfected and treated with insecticide to eliminate the fly population.

**Considering the present situation, the location of the event as well as the measures imposed to contain the EIA virus, the FEI views the risk of infection to be low for horses participating in the forthcoming CSIO3*-W-NC FEI event in Budapest.**

The **FEI will continue to monitor the situation** and provide additional information to National Federations should there be any change to the current situation.

**What is Equine Infectious Anaemia?**

Equine Infectious Anaemia (EIA) is a viral disease that can affect horses in two ways: they may suffer from an acute or a chronic manifestation of the disease. Once horses are infected by the EIA virus, they remain carriers for life and therefore serve as potential virus reservoirs.

**What are the Clinical Signs?**

Acutely affected horses develop a fever and the disease can be fatal. Horses suffering from the chronic form of the disease may show clinical signs such as a recurrent fever, anaemia, swellings and lethargy. Additionally, chronically infected horses may serve as persistent sources of the disease, despite appearing clinically healthy. These horses are known as “asymptomatic carriers”. Consequently, the legislation in many countries enforces the euthanasia of the infected horses.

**How is EIA transmitted?**

The disease can be transmitted in two ways:

1. Infected blood products – horses may be infected either following blood transfusions from other infected horses, or if hypodermic needles have been reused instead of being disposed of after initial use.

2. Flies – horses may develop the infection through bites of flies that have recently bitten an infected horse. These flies may only transmit the infection for very short periods of time.

**EIA Diagnosis and Treatment?**

EIA may be diagnosed on the basis of clinical signs, pathological lesions, serology and molecular methods. Coggins test, which is a laboratory-run blood test to diagnose EIA, may be performed on a suspected horse. There is unfortunately no treatment or vaccine available at this time for EIA.