

New Horse Health Concerns

Veterinarians and horse owners should remain vigilant for two relatively new horse health challenges: equine rhinitis A (ERAV) and B (ERBV) viruses and coronavirus.

Previously, ERAV and ERBV were rarely implicated as causes of equine disease. Equine rhinitis A appears to cause mild to moderate respiratory disease, with or without nasal discharge, pharyngitis (inflammation of the pharynx), and coughing. Horses shed ERAV in urine, feces, and respiratory secretions, whereas veterinarians have not recognized urine and fecal shedding of ERBV. In 2012 a conditionally licensed ERAV vaccine became available in the United States. Equine rhinitis viruses also have some zoonotic potential, meaning they are communicable to people, but the risk of human infection appears low.

In 1983 and 1990 veterinarians reported isolating a corona-type virus from adult horses and a foal with combined immunodeficiency, respectively. And since 2000 there have been various reports of coronavirus isolation in foals (without any known immune deficiencies) with diarrhea and other reports of adult horses with fevers and bowel disease. In 2011 and 2012 veterinarians reported a number of coronavirus cases in adult horses in the United States. Most of the horses were off their feed, lethargic, and febrile, and some had soft to watery manure. Most horses improved within four days, but 7% of affected animals were euthanized.

To avoid disease infection, farms and stables should adequately isolate newly introduced horses and, of course, any horses with clinical signs including respiratory disease and/or diarrhea. Your veterinarian can help you make rational decisions regarding testing and quarantine measures.

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