EQUINE INFLUENZA

Equine influenza is a flu-type illness caused by an influenza virus, which spreads rapidly. Previously New Zealand and Australia were the only two countries that do not have equine influenza. An outbreak in New Zealand would be devastating as it is a highly contagious disease.

Signs may include

- deep, dry, non-productive cough;
- high temperature (often 40-41 degrees C);
- clear nasal discharge possibly becoming cloudy and mucoid;
- harsh lung sounds;
- stiffness and soreness with reluctance to move;
- horses may become tired and not eat, often for days;
- foals can develop fatal pneumonia.

The consequences of equine influenza are far reaching as most horses in New Zealand have not been vaccinated against the virus. Many horses have to be rested for long periods after recovery and some may develop permanent damage to their lungs.

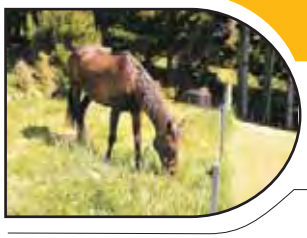
How it spreads

Equine influenza spreads by horses coughing out infected droplets that infect other horses in close proximity. These droplets may also land on equipment in the vicinity and may transmit virus to other horses if not disinfected properly. There is a short period after a horse is infected with the virus before signs of illness appear, usually 1-5 days. Infected horses can pass the virus to other horses during this time and for at least five days after horses appear to have recovered.

THE THREAT

Equine influenza is a fast spreading flu-like disease that affects equines of all ages and types. An outbreak in New Zealand would be devastating to the sport and pleasure horse communities.

August 2007



For more information visit: www.biosecurity.govt.nz

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Precautions you can take

When a horse (especially one from overseas) arrives on your property, keep it separate from other horses for 14 days. If it, or others in close proximity, develop a deep, dry cough or high temperature contact your vet or the MAF Biosecurity New Zealand exotic pest and disease hotline 0800 80 99 66 immediately.

All equipment used with:

- imported horses;
- horses that have been in contact with imported horses;
- or horses with respiratory signs,

must be cleaned and disinfected with an antiviral disinfectant.

Control measures

If an outbreak of equine influenza occurred in New Zealand, the stables involved and other affected places would be placed under quarantine. Horse movement would be restricted and horse events would likely be cancelled for the same period of time. Movement of people in contact with sick horses would also be limited. All equipment, transport vehicles, fences, stables and stalls would need to be cleaned and disinfected with a disinfectant.

Human health

Equine influenza is not a risk to human health.

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