

Equine Infectious Anaemia Questions and Answers

What is Equine Infectious Anaemia?

Equine Infectious Anaemia (EIA) or “swamp fever” is a virus disease of horses, mules and donkeys causing intermittent fever, anaemia, emaciation and death. Although not necessarily fatal, recovered animals become carriers of the disease and can infect other horses.

How is it transmitted?

The virus is usually transmitted mechanically, most commonly through blood-sucking insects (Tabanus or Stomoxys species) or through the use of contaminated blood or blood products, instruments or needles. Transmission of the disease may occur where there are large numbers of horseflies in proximity to acutely affected horses and occurs most often during periods of high insect activity, in low-lying swampy areas close to woodlands. Contaminated needles and blood products have also been implicated in the infection of horses, and transmission via colostrums or semen is uncommon. Pregnant mares may pass the disease to their foals in the womb.

Is there any risk to humans?

No.

How widespread is this disease?

EIA has a worldwide distribution. Early in the twentieth century serious outbreaks occurred in France, Japan and America. The disease has been reported in many parts of America, Asia (India, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand), Europe (Austria, France, Greece, Italy, Romania, USSR, Yugoslavia) and Australia. Since June 2006, one case was recorded in NI, and 28 cases have been detected in the Republic of Ireland.

Horses considered at risk to these outbreaks were traced, and

DARD restricted 65 horses on 34 premises in NI. In line with agreed policy, Coggins tests were carried out on each of the horses with a view to releasing the animals from restrictions if they tested negative for EIA after more than 90 days after their last possible exposure to the disease. All tests proved negative and final movement restrictions were lifted on all the horses on all premises in NI.

Currently, there are no horses or premises restricted because of EIA in NI.

How long does it take for the disease to become apparent?

The incubation period is variable, from a matter of days to a few months but generally 1 to 3 weeks. Antibodies usually, but not always, develop 7 to 14 days after infection and last for life. Horses have been known to take several months before clinical signs or antibodies are apparent.

Is it notifiable?

Yes. DARD must be notified of any suspicion of this disease.

Are restrictions placed on suspected infected or exposed to infection horses?

Yes, suspect horses are tested and placed in quarantine for a minimum of 90 days post exposure. This quarantine requires the separation of suspect horses from other horses, use of vector control methods such as fly repellents, and insect proof barriers. Should this initial test prove negative, further testing is carried out over the course of this quarantine period. If further tests prove negative restrictions are removed. If further testing proves positive, the affected animal would be euthanased and further testing of at risk horses carried out to detect any disease spread.

What are the EIA health requirements for moving horses between Member States of the European Union?

In order to move between EU Member States, horses must originate from premises which are not subject to prohibition for animal health reasons, must not have had contact with equidae from premises subject to prohibition. In the case of EIA the prohibition period lasts until the date on which, after slaughter of the infected animals the remaining animals at the same premises have had two negative tests for EIA carried out three months apart.