

Update on Florida Equine Piroplasmosis Outbreak

Authorities wrap up their investigations.

October 10, 2008

After a Florida horse tested positive for Equine Piroplasmosis (EP) in August 2008, the Florida State Veterinarian's Office began a full investigation. EP is a blood-borne parasitic disease that is primarily transmitted by ticks or contaminated needles. The symptoms of the disease range from acute fever, inappetence and malaise, to anemia and jaundice, sudden death, or chronic weight loss and poor exercise tolerance. The disease was eradicated from Florida in the 1980s, and the U.S. has been free of EP for two decades. Under law, suspected EP cases must be reported.

According to Florida officials, this recent EP outbreak investigation is near completion. There have been a total of seven counties and seven premises in Florida with horses that tested positive for EP. Throughout the investigation a total of 25 premises were placed under quarantine and approximately 200 horses were tested. Premises are being released from quarantine after obtaining negative test results and after an extended period of time since exposure. There is only one premise left that still has EP positive horses, five horses in total. All other horses that tested positive have been euthanized.

All of the horses that tested positive for EP have been directly linked to what is believed to be two horses that entered Florida from Mexico. The evidence indicates that the disease transmission was by management practices of shared needles, and not by ticks. No exotic ticks have been found and all testing on the collected ticks has been negative for EP.

Due to this EP outbreak, Canada placed movement restrictions on U.S. horses being exported to Canada and would not accept horses from Florida. Canada has since revised its requirements to allow horses from Florida with additional export requirements.

For horses that are being exported to Canada from Florida, an import permit is required as well as certification that the horse was inspected within 15 days prior to the date of importation into Canada. Additional certifications on the export health certificate are required, including that the horse was not on a premises where EP occurred (or where EP occurred on an adjoining premises) during 60 days prior to exportation, and a negative cELISA test during the 15 days prior to the date of exportation.

Horses that are being exported to Canada from states other than Florida need additional certification specifying that in the 21 days prior to exportation the horse was not in the state of Florida. These restrictions will be in effect until further notice.