



Equine Enteric Coronavirus

The Educated Horseman: Disease Series



Equine enteric coronavirus has been diagnosed in Louisiana by the LSU School of Veterinary Medicine. Coronaviruses are part of a larger a large group of RNA viruses that can cause both respiratory and intestinal distress in a variety of species, including birds, dogs, cats, swine, cattle, horses and humans.

While the equine coronavirus is similar to bovine coronavirus, which displays both respiratory and intestinal distress; the coronavirus that affects horses currently is seen only as an intestinal (enteric) disease. This infection spreads in horses via fecal-oral transmission, which may occur when horses are stabled together or during transport, and is more common during the colder months of the year.

Horses affected with equine enteric coronavirus tend to have fevers above 102 F, have a loss of appetite and may appear depressed or lethargic. These symptoms typically will disappear in one to four days with minimal treatment. Less commonly, horses may experience one to two days of diarrhea or loose feces and signs of mild colic. In rare cases, additional complications can occur such as septicemia (bloodstream infection), endotoxemia (endotoxins from bacteria released into the bloodstream) and neurologic abnormalities.

Equine enteric coronavirus is highly infectious, but only very rare cases result in death. Typical treatments include supportive care such as intravenous fluids, fever-reducing medications and gastrointestinal support.

Once a horse has been diagnosed with equine coronavirus, that animal must be isolated, and strict biosecurity measures must be put into effect. Keep in mind horses that no longer are showing clinical symptoms still can shed the coronavirus through their manure for up to three weeks, and some horses may shed the virus without showing any signs at all.

Encourage horse handlers to use disinfectant footbaths, disposable gloves and individual equipment for horses diagnosed with equine coronavirus. Limiting traffic into and out of the barn and the use of veterinary grade disinfectants will help reduce the chance of spreading the virus.



While diagnosis of equine enteric coronavirus typically is not a fatal event, special attention is required to prevent and control the disease in horses. Effective biosecurity principles must be followed to prevent the spread of infection.

There currently is no vaccine available for equine coronavirus. Therefore, supportive care is necessary to reduce the effects of the disease. If you are concerned your horse may have equine enteric coronavirus, contact your veterinarian immediately.

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References

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