



Coombefield Veterinary Hospital Equine Newsletter January 2015

Update on Recent Flu Outbreaks and Vaccination

The importance of continued vaccination has been demonstrated by the recent outbreaks of equine influenza across the UK.

There have been 28 outbreaks across the UK from January to November 2014, 50% of these since the beginning of October 2014 – all in unvaccinated horses.



Equine flu is a serious issue for anyone owning or working with horses. It is very contagious and can be spread by droplets in the air, or on inanimate objects such as horseboxes/stabling, tack and clothing. Symptoms vary in severity but include high fever, nasal discharge, dry cough and a poor appetite. Mildly affected horses can recover in 2-3 weeks, however in serious cases secondary complications including pneumonia can occur.

The 2007 outbreak in Australia affected 76,000 horses on 10,000 premises. The imported horse that brought in the virus had been vaccinated but it is believed the vaccine didn't contain antigens active against the latest circulating strains of flu. The outbreak was eventually halted by using a vaccine containing up-to-date strains; the same vaccine used here at Coombefield Veterinary Hospital.

Evolving Viruses!

Equine flu viruses, as with other flu viruses, undergo a phenomenon known as 'antigenic drift' due to the gradual accumulation of mutations in the genes. These mutations eventually lead to significant changes in the virus which can mean a breakdown of immunity against out of date vaccines. This is why the human flu vaccine changes regularly and why certain strains (swine flu for example) can cause pandemics of severe illness.

Currently the Florida strain is the most common virus. There are 2 strains (known as Clades). These are referred to as Clade 1 and Clade 2, both of which now appear to account for all current infection globally. American cases seem to be mainly Clade 1 viruses where as in Europe they are generally Clade 2.

The Animal Health Trust has diagnosed numerous cases of equine influenza in the UK (see map); the viruses isolated in these cases all belonged to the Clade 2 group.

Staying Ahead With Updated Vaccination

The UK's first and **only** updated vaccines to contain the **Clade 2 virus** antigen are the Proteq vaccines, which we use at CoombeField. This is also the only vaccine that contains the OIE (the international expert panel on animal health) recommended strains.

It is important to note that vaccinated horses may carry and shed the virus without showing any signs of the disease. This means that all unvaccinated in contact horses are at risk. Approximately 55% of horses in the UK are un-vaccinated. Most of the higher risk travelling and competition horses are vaccinated due to compulsory rules; however it only takes a local event or gathering of horses with a carrier and an unvaccinated animal for the virus to take hold.

We have chosen this vaccine for our patients as it is the ONLY up to date vaccine; no other vaccine can offer the same level of protection.

From the 19th January 2015 for 4 weeks we will be holding a vaccination amnesty. If you think your horse(s) may be unvaccinated or their vaccination has lapsed, please contact the Equine department on 01297 630515 to arrange a visit.

EQUINE INFO

If you would like to speak to an Equine vet or arrange a visit, please ring 01297 630515
Medicines can be requested via email or by telephone

Email: farm@axvets.co.uk

