

## **EQUINE HERPES DISEASE (Rhinopneumonitis)**

This virus can cause respiratory disease, abortion, or neurological disease. We currently vaccinate against respiratory disease (Calvenza® influenza/rhinopneumonitis vaccine) and against abortion (Prodigy® rhinopneumonitis vaccine). The neurological disease has been in the press recently with outbreaks at racetracks in Florida and some horse shows. There have been a few cases in Northern California with some of the cases being taken to the Veterinary School at UC Davis. The neurological disease is serious and can be fatal. It is caused by a subtype of EHV1 (Equine Herpes Virus 1). The neurological disease has been around for years, and it is uncertain if we are facing real epidemic or just a spike of a few cases.

All of the forms of rhinopneumonitis are highly contagious and are primarily spread by respiratory secretions. The killed vaccines we currently use are of little or no use in preventing the neurological disease. A recent study (not yet published) compared a modified live EHV1 vaccine (Rhinomune) to the killed vaccines and to a control group, and, while there were only small numbers of horses in the test, the Rhinomune was effective in preventing the neurological disease. This vaccine should not be used in pregnant mares unless the mares are confronted with an outbreak of neurological disease.

This vaccine is now available at our clinic. We are recommending it where horses travel to shows or other competitions or when they are housed with a transient population of horses. The vaccine protocol involves an initial injection followed by a booster in 3 weeks with additional boosters every 3 months during times of potential exposure. Some owner may chose to alternate between the Rhinomune and the Calvenza vaccines. The Rhinomune does not come in combination with influenza and the flu vaccine must be given as a separate injection every 6 months.

We also have available an immune stimulant drug (Zylexis) which is given in a 3 dose intramuscular protocol. This drug was shown to be helpful in preventing the respiratory form of herpes. This may also be useful to owners who are taking their horses to shows. Like Rhinomune, the Zylexis can be dispensed to clients if we are familiar with the management of your horses.

The best prevention for herpes is to keep your horse from nose to nose contact with other horses. Aerosols from coughs and sneezes can travel 12-16 feet. The virus can also be spread by hands, clothing, and instruments. Horses contracting herpes may only show a sudden rise in body temperature with possibly a snotty nose or cough. If you are concerned about an exposure, please call the clinic and we will come out and examine your horse. The most definitive and timely test for herpes is a nasal swab which is sent to UCD for a PCR test.

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