

Equine Herpesvirus-1 (EHV-1) Infection Badminton March 2013

On Friday 15th March a horse showing clinical signs consistent with the neurological form of EHV-1 infection was examined by a veterinary surgeon in the Beaufort Hunt stables at Badminton House Gloucestershire. EHV-1 infection was subsequently confirmed the following day on samples analysed at The Animal Health Trust, Newmarket. The stables and all horses present were isolated immediately and hunting was cancelled the following day in order to prevent further spread of the virus.

A total of 33 horses were identified as being potential contacts by virtue of being on the affected premises with the horse showing clinical signs, although only six of these were in close contact within the same airspace. One of these six animals has subsequently been identified as a potential source of the EHV-1 infection as it was brought to the stables from another yard in close proximity to a recent outbreak of EHV-1 infection.

Testing of all in-contact horses on the affected Badminton premises was undertaken immediately by nasal swabs and blood samples on confirmation of the diagnosis. Tests results received on Monday 18th and Tuesday 19th March (this week) confirmed evidence of EHV-1 infection but only among the six close contacts within the same shared airspace as the clinical case and none of these animals has shown clinical signs of disease. There is currently no evidence clinically, serologically (blood) or virologically (swab) of infection among any of the horses outside the immediate contacts within the shared airspace, although further tests are required to confirm freedom from infection in these groups. The horse showing clinical signs is improving and is expected to make a full recovery.

On Wednesday 20th March, a meeting was held at Badminton with Dr Richard Newton, the Head of Epidemiology and Disease Surveillance at The Animal Health Trust, Newmarket, in order to develop a strategy to contain the outbreak and to provide an effective biosecurity programme in order to ensure the safe running of the Badminton Horse Trials between the 2nd and 6th May 2013. As a result of this meeting several actions have been undertaken, as described below.

All horses housed in the Event stables were moved away immediately from Badminton House and Park, where the Event is to take place i.e. the premises have been de-populated of horses in order to facilitate a thorough and repeated cleaning and disinfection process of all stables that would receive Event horses during the Trials. The Event is in the fortunate position of having available isolation premises both separate to the Park and neighbouring properties. These premises are far enough away from Badminton House and Park so that, even in the event of further cases developing, they will not be in a position to threaten the Event stables and grounds. This process also allows separate isolation of the six close contact horses in their own facility. All the in-contact horses will be closely monitored and be subject to further blood sampling and nasal swabs under the direction of Dr Newton until we are satisfied that they are either clear of disease or no longer at risk.

No horse will enter the Beaufort Hunt Stables and no riding in the Park is to be allowed between now and competitors arriving for The Badminton Horse Trials in six weeks time so that there will be no opportunity for any virus spread in the area. (The virus can only be spread by close contact and cannot survive for prolonged periods outside of horses and in the environment). In the meantime all the Event stables will be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected according to an approved protocol which has been tried and tested in the past including at The Olympic Games London 2012.

We are assured that with the prolonged absence of horses from the stable environment following prompt de-population of the Event stables that this approach will provide a clean and safe environment for competitors and their horses at The Badminton Horse Trials.

It is an accepted risk of horse competition that horses coming from many different home stables and environments can carry infection with them and present a risk to each other. although this risk is considered to be acceptably small (but never zero in the case of EHV-1) in 'elite' athletic horses such as those attending the Badminton Horse Trials. However it is to be hoped that all horses taking part will be monitored as part of their normal programme at home and, as always in the past, all horses will be routinely examined by veterinary surgeons on arrival at Badminton before being allowed into the stables.

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