

AFRICAN HORSE SICKNESS

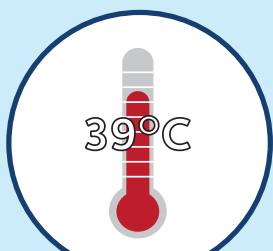
SIGNS TO WATCH FOR IN YOUR HORSE OR PONY

A SERIOUS DISEASE WHICH CAN CAUSE DEATH IN HORSES AND PONIES

African Horse Sickness (AHS) is one of the most deadly equine viruses, with some forms causing death in 90% of infected animals.

If you see any of these signs, house your horse or pony immediately. Make sure that insects cannot bite them and spread infection further.

MOST COMMON SIGNS ARE:



TEMPERATURE HIGHER THAN 39°C OR 102°F

Sweating may be seen



BREATHING DIFFICULTIES AND SPASMODIC COUGHING

With widely open nostrils



SWELLING ABOVE THE EYELIDS

And also in the face, tongue and neck



REDDENED EYES



FROTHY NASAL DISCHARGE

In the terminal stages

DEATH CAN BE SUDDEN

YOU MAY NEED TO CONSIDER EUTHANASIA IF YOUR ANIMAL IS SUFFERING – FOLLOW GOVERNMENT ADVICE

Contact your vet or animal health worker if your horse or pony looks sick; they can take a sample and test for this disease.

There is no specific cure, but supportive treatment should be provided. Allow the horse to rest and provide shelter to protect from biting insects.

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GUIDANCE NOTES

Of all equine species, horses and ponies are particularly susceptible and have a mortality rate of 50-95%. We cannot be certain how European and Asian horses and ponies will respond to African Horse Sickness, but the disease is newly introduced into the region, and so the outcome could be unpredictable as they have probably had no exposure to this virus before (a naive population) and may have no immunity. The mortality rate in the current outbreak has been high.

African horse sickness is spread by the bite of an insect that is infected with the virus. The main biting insect carrying this disease is the *Culicoides* midge, but other biting insects can also spread the disease.

Horses usually carry the virus for 4-8 days, but this may extend to 21 days, resulting in an extended period during which more insects may bite and become infected.

Donkeys and mules are also susceptible to the disease and should be carefully monitored for signs of ill health as these signs can be very subtle and easily missed.

Typical signs include:

- A fever with high temperatures and sweating
- Spasmodic coughing
- Swelling around the head, and particularly above the eye. Also seen in the neck, which may make it difficult to swallow
- Reddening of the membranes of the gums and eyes, these may appear as red spots
- Colic signs such as rolling or pawing
- Difficulty breathing with wide open nostrils and extended neck. The breathing rate can be in excess of 50 breaths per minute (with the presence of defined stomach muscles due to forced expiration)
- A frothy discharge is seen from the nostrils in the terminal stages of the disease and death usually occurs within a few hours.

Not all cases show all these signs and signs may vary in severity.

A subclinical form may be seen where there is some immunity or vaccination. In these cases horses and ponies may show signs of fever, depression and reduced appetite; these symptoms do not tend to last a long time and the horse usually recovers within a few days.

What to do if you suspect that your horse or pony may be displaying symptoms:

- Contact your local vet or animal health worker as soon as possible
- Rest your horse
- House your horse or pony, where possible, in a shelter that is protected from biting insects
- Take other preventative measures to stop biting insects such as using an insect repellent.

Note: active surveillance for other infections, such as glanders and strangles, may mean that AHS is missed and combined infections in an animal can complicate the signs. It is important to test and record the information about disease spread.