



**ST DAVID'S EQUINE**  
VETERINARY SURGEONS

# FACTSHEET

## PARALYTIC FORM OF EQUINE HERPES VIRUS INFECTION

**The paralytic form of Equine Herpes Virus infection is caused by EHV 1 which causes inflammation of the blood vessels in the central nervous system. The brain and spinal cord and their soft tissue surroundings can be affected and the signs depend on the parts of the body that are controlled by areas of the central nervous system that are affected.**

The most common signs are ataxia (loss of full control of the limbs) leading to wobbliness and weakness of the affected limbs. The symptoms may vary from only a slight wobbliness, to the horse losing control of its limbs to the extent that it goes down and cannot rise. The hind limbs are more commonly affected than the front limbs.

The symptoms usually appear suddenly without warning and then worsen over 24 hours. They then stabilise and may improve. Many horses that are mildly affected may improve fully and lead a normal life following recovery. If the damage to the central nervous system is more profound, the horse may not recover normal function of its limbs. Horses that go down and cannot rise with the disease have a poor (although not hopeless) prognosis for a full recovery.

It used to be thought that the neurological form of EHV was not caused by direct viral action but by a post-viral reaction of the body's own immune system. Because of this, vaccination was not thought in the past to be helpful in preventing disease. However, the disease is now thought to be caused directly by infection of specific strains of the EHV virus. This means that the disease is likely to be contagious from horse to horse by direct contact and so affected yards are closed with no horse movement on or off the premises until the virus has been eliminated.

The fact that direct viral infection is now thought to be involved means that vaccination is recommended to protect against the disease (although the vaccine does not have a license claim against the neurological form of the disease). It is not recommended, however, to vaccinate a horse that is already suffering from the disease.

Vaccination for EHV1 and 4 can be carried out as follows:

- 2 doses 4-6 weeks apart confer initial immunity.
- Booster doses are required every 6 months to maintain immunity.

As with all our vaccination products, we as a practice have worked with our vaccine supplier (Pfizer) to ensure that our vaccine prices are kept low. We also offer the second vaccination of a primary course free of charge, provided that the fee for the vaccination has been paid in full. The visit for the second vaccination is charged at the normal rate.

**For more details or to arrange to vaccinate your horse, please contact the practice on 01392 876622.**