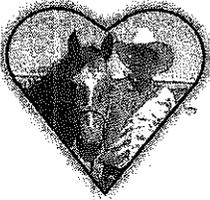


Hey Neighbor



# For The Love Of Horses

By Frank J. Buchman

## The facts behind Coggins testing

The reasoning behind Coggins test requirements for horses is not clearly understood by most horse owners.

"For any horse to cross state-lines and participate in the state fair and many other shows, rodeos, sales or even to go onto breeding farms, they are required to have a negative Coggins test," according to Dr. Tom Jernigan, Council Grove veterinarian.

"The test detects equine infectious anemia, also referred to as EIA, and sometimes called swamp fever," pointed out Dr. Bryan Barr at the Emporia Veterinary Hospital.

A viral disease that affects the horse's immune system and other organs, EIA is blood borne and transmitted via biting insects such as horseflies and mosquitoes, the veterinarians explained.

The Coggins test is based on the detection of antibodies in the horse's blood. "Once a horse is infected with EIA, the antibodies will be present in the blood for life," explained Dr. Leroy Coggins, developer of the test.

The USDA does not have an eradication program for EIA, but a nationally approved laboratory system has been established to perform the Coggins test.

While Jernigan and Barr have each given the Coggins test to thousands of horses in their careers, neither have had much experience with EIA.

Barr has had two horses test positive in his years of practice, while Jernigan has only had a single positive case. Both question the necessity of the Coggins test in Kansas.

"There is a higher incidence of EIA in states like

Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi where there are warm, wet regions. The disease can occur wherever there is a vector to transmit it," Barr stressed.

It can also be spread by used hypodermic needles.

Horses infected with EIA can be in three stages. The first is the acute form, when the horse will be depressed, uncoordinated and feverish but is rarely anemic. This phase will last several days and the horse is most likely to transmit the disease to nearby horses.

It is followed by the chronic phase which is characterized by weight loss, recurring fevers, general weakness and anemia. At this point EIA continues to be transmittable.

In the carrier-only stage, the horse has an absence of clinical signs, but can still infect other horses.

"A horse infected with the EIA virus will always be a carrier of the disease," Barr emphasized. "There is no effective treatment or cure for EIA, and there is no vaccine to prevent it."

"This is the main reason for the Coggins test," added Jernigan. "Carriers pose a threat to the entire equine community."

It was noted that since the early 1960s, several outbreaks of EIA have occurred nationally at large racetracks and breeding farms, resulting in the deaths of many horses.

There are only two options for horses that test positive for EIA. They must be quarantined for life in a screened stall or be euthanized.

While it makes owners cringe, some federal and state agencies, as well as the American Association of Equine Practitioners, support euthanasia as the most prudent option.

However, with the one positive-tested horse Jernigan had experience with, the owner kept the horse quarantined for the remainder of its life.

"We Coggins-tested the horse several times, and it was always positive," Jernigan said. "Other horses on the farm tested negative, and the owners took them wherever they wanted."

Quarantine requirements include confinement in a screened stall with a 200-yard buffer from all other horses.

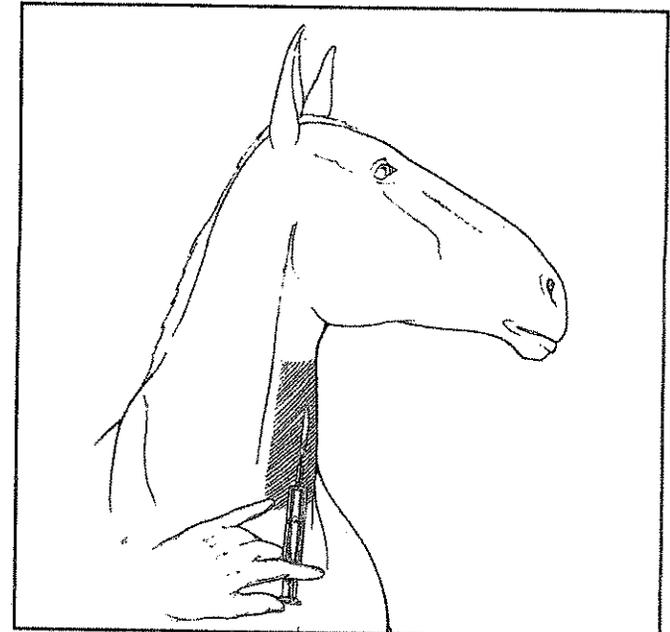
Annually, there are only about a half dozen positive Coggins tests in Kansas, according to the Kansas Animal Health Department, but the threat of EIA remains.

Diagnosis of EIA is a serious problem for both the horse and horse owners. Coggins testing ensures that any carriers of the virus are removed from the general horse population,

thus lowering the incidence of the disease.

"A negative Coggins test is good for one year for horses in Kansas," Jernigan pointed out. Total cost for a test is usually around \$20, he noted. Some states require a Coggins test every six months.

Coggins testing requirements protect the horse and allow peace of mind for owners. Not only do horse owners know their horses test negative for the disease, but also that other owner's horses tested negative.



Blood must be drawn from the horse by a veterinarian for a Coggins test at least once a year in Kansas.

## Coggins Testing Is Necessary Horse Regulation

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