
RESOLUTION NUMBER: 11 APPROVED

SUBJECT MATTER: Abnormal Equine Health Events at International Import Quarantine Facilities

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The recent closure of the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Miami Animal Import Center, in conjunction with previous disease outbreaks associated with imported equidae, has raised concerns amongst animal health officials and the industry overall. Notably, between November 2018 and April 2019, the USDA identified over 200 sick horses imported from the European Union. Management of imported equidae displaying signs of ill health at an Animal Import Quarantine facility is critical for protecting the health of the United States equine population.

RESOLUTION:

The United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) urges the USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Veterinary Services (VS) to take the following actions at all International Animal Import Quarantine Facilities:

- 1) Develop standard operating procedures for import quarantine facility staff and veterinarians to identify, investigate, document, report, and track cases of abnormal equine health events.
- 2) Develop a standardized electronic system to consistently and uniformly record details of each abnormal health event which should minimally include vital signs, physical exam findings, and date and time of examination.
- 3) Identify abnormal health events/parameters in equines and conduct further assessment to classify such as contagious, non-contagious, or other.
- 4) Adopt a system to accurately evaluate each equine displaying clinical signs of disease, to clinically evaluate each case of a potentially infectious disease, to identify the infectious agent, and to determine the possible risk of exposure to other imported equines. Protocols should include diagnostic testing at owner/agent's expense, based on the syndromic clinical presentation.
- 5) Notify State Animal Health Officials in both the state of destination and the state in which the equine is currently located of any abnormal equine health events identified and classified as possibly infectious. The notification should include any potentially exposed cohorts with report prior to release from quarantine.

- 6) Modify VS 17-30 (Report of Animals, Poultry, or Eggs Offered for Importation) such that it documents the potential risk of exposure to infectious disease for any equines associated with the abnormal health event.
- 7) Develop and implement a compliance agreement between owners/agents and the USDA that includes recommended biosecurity measures for destination premises.
- 8) Track all abnormal health events for equines being imported into the United States and report such events to equine stakeholders if requested or applicable.

INTERIM RESPONSE:

USDA, APHIS, VS appreciates the recommendation from USAHA and the opportunity to respond. USDA APHIS recognizes the concern of managing imported horses which arrive ill or become ill while in federal import quarantine. APHIS is committed to making improvements to the current standard operating procedures (SOP) by increasing communication with State Animal Health Officials on these standards and increasing sick horse notifications.

APHIS will provide this revised SOP to USAHA upon its completion. In addition, APHIS will explore options for additional information sharing utilizing the animal import module in the Veterinary Services Process Streamlining system. APHIS will continue to modify and improve information collection, tracking and reporting on these cases to enable timely notification to officials in exporting countries and pressing for their corrective actions to reduce the number of sick horses being exported to the U.S. and to protect American agriculture.

FINAL RESPONSE:

USDA, APHIS, VS appreciates the recommendation from USAHA and the opportunity to respond. APHIS recognizes the concern of managing imported horses that arrive ill or become ill while in Federal import quarantine. APHIS has made improvements to the current national standard operating procedures (SOP) by increasing communication with State Animal Health Officials (SAHOs) on these standards and increasing sick horse notifications.

APHIS provided the revised national SOP to the USAHA committee on equine in August 2020. This SOP strengthens the procedures completed by port personnel for sick horses in quarantine and outlines required communication and notification to SAHOs in the State of final destination. The SOP has been received positively by the committee, acknowledging that the national SOP addresses many of the recommendations from the USAHA Committee on Equine working group.

In addition, APHIS encourages States to utilize the VS Process Streamlining (VSPS) system. This system allows all SAHOs to view information immediately when an animal is imported into the country destined for their State. APHIS will provide opportunities in fiscal year 2021 including a webinar to discuss how VSPS can be used for State officials. APHIS prerecorded videos located in the VSPS library are specifically geared

towards SAHOs on how to access VSPS. APHIS will continue to modify and improve information collection, tracking, and reporting on cases of sick horses to enable timely notification to officials in exporting countries and press for corrective actions to reduce the number of sick horses exported to the United States.