

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS



Department of Agricultural Resources

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Potomac Horse Fever in Massachusetts

Potomac Horse Fever (PHF) is a seasonal bacterial disease of horses. The disease is caused by the bacteria *Neorickettsia risticii*. The complicated transmission cycle is associated with freshwater snails and certain aquatic insects. Clinical signs in horses include fever, colic, and diarrhea. Horses that are sick with PHF are not considered to pose a risk to other horses. Treatment of sick horses should be initiated promptly to avoid the potential for severe dehydration and colitis which may be fatal.

Although the disease is unusual in New England, Massachusetts has had a single confirmed case at a Norfolk County stable with a second suspect case at the same farm. The Equine Disease Communication Center (EDCC) also reports a case at a farm in CT.

There is a commercial vaccine approved and available that may offer some protection. Other recommendations to prevent transmission include not letting horses drink from streams and ponds, cleaning water buckets to remove any insects, and turning off lights in stables at night to avoid attracting insects. It is also suggested to be careful not to sweep dead insects off the floor into stalls or mangers where horses may inadvertently consume them.

Please monitor your horses' health. Temperature monitoring continues to be our best early warning system. Please report any sick animals promptly to your veterinarian so potentially life-saving treatment can begin right away.

Veterinarians should contact MDAR Animal Health Division at 617-626-1795 to report cases of Potomac Health Fever in MA.