



AFRICAN HORSE SICKNESS

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What is African horse sickness?

African horse sickness is a serious disease of equines caused by a virus. Infected horses show fever, swelling of the head and neck, difficulty breathing, foam and blood coming from the nostrils and often death.

2. Where does African horse sickness occur?

African horse sickness is endemic in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, including most of South Africa. In the Western Cape there is an African horse sickness Free Zone within the City of Cape Town, which is surrounded by a Surveillance Zone and Protection Zone where African horse sickness controls are in place to keep the disease out of these zones. A map of these zones can be viewed at www.myhorse.org.za.

3. How does African horse sickness spread?

African horse sickness is spread between horses by biting midges (Afrikaans: muggies). Outbreaks therefore most often occur when there is water for midges to breed and the weather is relatively warm in autumn and spring. A new outbreak can occur in an area as a result of an infected horse being moved into that area and the local midges then spreading the virus between horses.

4. Can people or other animals get African horse sickness?

Horses, mules and donkeys are all affected by African horse sickness. Zebras can be infected with the virus, but do not show clinical signs of disease. Dogs can also get sick with African horse sickness if they are fed meat from an infected horse. Other animals and people are not affected by African horse sickness.

5. How do I move my horse into or within the Western Cape?

There are many regulations for movement of horses within the Western Cape, depending on which zones they are moving into or out of, the time of year and the prevalence of African horse sickness cases in their areas of origin. For a comprehensive guide to horse movement and to apply for a movement permit, go to www.myhorse.org.za.

6. Can I vaccinate my horse?

It is compulsory to vaccinate your horse if it resides in the Infected Zone or the Protection Zone. In the Surveillance Zone and the Free Zone, vaccination of horses is not allowed without official permission. Applications for vaccination must be done using the form at www.myhorse.org.za. Vaccination of horses should take place between 1 June and 31 October each year and a registered vaccine must be used. The only currently registered vaccine in South Africa is a live vaccine produced by Onderstepoort Biological Products (OBP), which is given in two doses, three weeks apart.

7. How else can I protect my horse?

Horses can be protected from midge bites by stabling them between dusk and dawn when midges are at their most active, spraying horses regularly with an insect repellent containing DEET, as well as keeping horses away from wet and marshy areas. Midge populations can be reduced on a property by getting rid of standing water. If you see signs of African horse sickness, contact your vet as soon as possible. There is no specific treatment for African horse sickness, but with supportive treatment some horses may recover.

Last updated: March 2022

