Equine Disease Communication Center:

Contagious Equine Metritis

Disease Name: Contagious Equine Metritis (CEM)

Disease Type: Bacterial, Venereal Disease

Transmission: *Taylorella equigenitalis* is the bacteria responsible for CEM. Venereal transmission of the bacteria can occur by live cover or by artificial insemination (AI) with fresh or frozen semen. Stallion-to-stallion transmission can occur through contaminated equipment at semen collection facilities or veterinary clinics. The bacteria can also be spread by reuse of buckets or cleaning supplies between geldings during sheath-cleaning. Uncommonly, transmission can occur from mare to foal either in the womb or during birth.

Frequency: Low, but several incursions of CEM have occurred in the US. CEM is an internationally reportable disease. When the carrier status of a particular stallion or infection of a mare is suspected in the US, your veterinarian will contact the State and/or Federal Animal Health Official.

Incubation period: Once the bacteria is introduced to a mare, infection of the reproductive tract occurs. Clinical signs typically appear within 10-14 days. Stallions and geldings do not develop clinical signs of CEM, but harbor the organism on their genitalia.

Carrier status: Infected stallions carry *Taylorella equigenitalis* on their genitals for an extended period (years) without displaying any symptoms of illness. Mares bred to a carrier stallion by natural cover or AI with contaminated semen become infected. Most mares eventually clear the infection, but a small percentage of mares can become persistently infected carriers for an extended period. Foals born to infected/carrier mares may also become long term carriers of the organism.

Shedding period: Stallions and geldings without clinical signs can carry the bacteria on their genitals. Mares can carry the bacteria for months after infection and may or may not have symptoms during this time. A small percentage of mares can become persistent carriers for an extended period.

Severity: Moderate. CEM causes short-term infertility in mares, and rarely abortion.

Clinical signs and symptoms: Stallions and geldings show no signs of CEM and serve as carrier animals for spreading the bacteria.

Clinical signs in mares:

- Vaginal discharge
- Infertility
- Short-cycling after breeding
- Rarely, abortion

Diagnosis: Diagnosis is made by having an accredited veterinarian swab specific areas of the genitals of stallions or mares and submit the swabs to an approved laboratory for culture.

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Additionally, a serum sample should also be collected from a clinical or recently exposed mare for complement fixation testing (CFT) for *Taylorella equigenitalis* antibodies in serum.

Treatment: Treatment with antibiotics is performed in quarantine under the supervision of regulatory animal health officials. Horses must be retested after treatment and are not cleared for release from quarantine until results are negative. Treatment consists of thorough washing of the external genitalia in stallions or mares using a disinfectant soap (e.g., 2% chlorhexidine) followed by thorough rinsing and application of a topical antibiotic (e.g., nitrofurazone or silver sulfadiazine). These steps are repeated for five consecutive days. Most horses will respond well to a single treatment series; however some may need retreatment.

Prognosis: After treatment, fertility appears to return to normal in recovered horses.

Prevention: Annual testing of stallions prior to the breeding season as a means of reducing the risk of spread has been proposed and is recommended by USDA for active breeding stallions. Horses that are imported into the United States from CEM-affected countries must also undergo testing. Call your veterinarian if your mare has reproductive problems or displays signs of CEM. Keep accurate breeding records on breeding dates and stallion used for mares and on semen collection dates for stallions.

Biosecurity: Stringent biosecurity practices must be used during semen collection or genital handling of stallions and geldings to prevent spread of *Taylorella equigenitalis*. In some cases, *Taylorella equigenitalis* was found to be transmitted on equipment up to 3 days after the equipment was last used for collection. Cleaning, drying, and disinfection of all collection equipment including but not limited to wash buckets, artificial vaginas, and mounting dummies between uses is critical to prevent transmission among stallions. During sheath cleaning, use a disposable bucket liner or clean and disinfect the wash bucket, use disposable wash rags or paper towels, avoid cross contamination of hoses, and change gloves between geldings.

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