Equine Influenza Virus: Effective Vaccines and the Affects on the Horse Racing Industry

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY-New research has found two vaccines to be the most effective against Equine Influenza Virus (EIV), a highly contagious disease among horses.

EIV has spread around the world and has a major impact on the horse racing industry because vaccinated horses have been able to contract the disease. The symptoms of EIV are anorexia, a harsh, dry cough and nasal discharge.

The research has found the vaccines Boehringer and ProteqFlu to work the best. Research also showed that giving the vaccine in three doses, instead of the traditionally two, offers more protection.

Mark A. Holmes, DVM, said Boehringer was the only vaccine in his study that produced a significant immune response over the six month period after the horses were given the vaccination.

Caroline Edlund Toulemonde, DVM, said only half of a group of ponies vaccinated with ProteqFlu showed any sign of the disease and their symptoms were very mild. The unvaccinated ponies had severe coughing and had to be treated with antibiotics.

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EIV can spread quickly through racehorses’ barns because there are a lot of horses in a small area and horses are often moving around to different tracks. The signs of EIV often appear one to five days after a horse has been introduced to the virus.

Kunio Satou, from the Department of Epidemiology for the National Institute of Animal Health in Japan, said more than 80% of the racehorses stabled at eight racetracks were infected with the virus after an outbreak of EIV in Japan in 1971.

An outbreak of EIV at the Newmarket racecourse in the United Kingdom in 2003 infected more than 1,300 racehorses.

Many racetracks and countries ban, or at least limit, the movement of horses when there is an outbreak of EIV. This can have a major affect on the racing industry because more horses are traveling overseas for racing and breeding.

The entire horse industry, not just the horse racing industry, can be affected by the rapid spread of EIV. Quick response by the horse owner and the veterinarian can help to contain the virus and protect other horses.

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