



Rogue Valley Equine Hospital

14099 Hwy 62
Eagle Point, OR 97524
Phone (541)826-9001 Fax (541)826-1099
www.roguevalleyequine.com

William W. Ferguson, D.V.M.
Thomas R. Timmons, D.V.M.
Mitchell K. Benson, D.V.M.

Horse Health Bulletin From Rogue Valley Equine Hospital

Potomac Horse Fever diagnosed at a Shady Cove stable.

In late August a rescued, aged mare became ill with fever, a loss of appetite and diarrhea. The mare was examined and treated with IV antibiotics, fluids administered via a nasogastric tube to correct dehydration and other supportive care. The mare responded well to the treatment and was eating and drinking on her own within 48 hours. The initial antibody titer to Potomac Horse Fever (PHF) was only slightly elevated, but a second titer taken five days later was very high, confirming the diagnosis. The mare had not been vaccinated for PHF.

PHF is caused by a bacteria, *Neorickettsia risticii*, that is related to the bacteria that causes salmon poisoning in dogs. Infection with this organism results in severe colitis and diarrhea and is life-threatening to horses. The most common way that horses contract PHF is by consuming insects or fly larvae of insects that lay their eggs in water. These insects carry the organism responsible for the disease. UC Davis has recently published evidence that the disease can also be transmitted by insects baled in the hay that horses eat. The disease is not normally transmitted from horse to horse. This case is noteworthy, in that the mare had no access to ponds, streams or rivers, and the owners were diligent about cleaning the water buckets regularly. After becoming aware that PHF was a possibility, the owners discovered fly larvae in the mare's water buckets that had apparently not been eliminated by rinsing the buckets every few days.

How To Prevent Potomac Horse Fever

1. Keep water sources clean. Because *Neorickettsia risticii* live inside of insects, especially aquatic ones, make sure your troughs and water buckets are clean. Do not allow your water to stand and become infested with insects and larvae. This will help with mosquito control as well.
 2. Keep your horses vaccinated. The PHF vaccine will boost your horses immunity against the disease, and although it may not prevent all cases, vaccinated horses tend to have much milder symptoms with fewer complications. In our practice, we have not seen PHF in a vaccinated horse and strongly recommend yearly vaccination.
 3. Turn off the lights. Keeping barn lights on at night attracts large numbers of insects that can then end up in the horses feed and water buckets.
-

4. Know the symptoms. PHF symptoms include fever, diarrhea, loss of appetite, and lower extremity swelling. Laminitis or founder is a common, severe complication. If your horse shows any of these symptoms, call your veterinarian immediately. Early treatment of PHF is critical. The condition of affected horses can deteriorate rapidly.

If you have any questions, please contact us.

The staff at Rogue Valley Equine Hospital

Rogue Valley Equine Hospital

14099 Hwy 62

Eagle Point, OR 97524

kristin@roguevalleyequine.com

(541) 826-9001 Fax (541) 826-1099

www.rveh.com