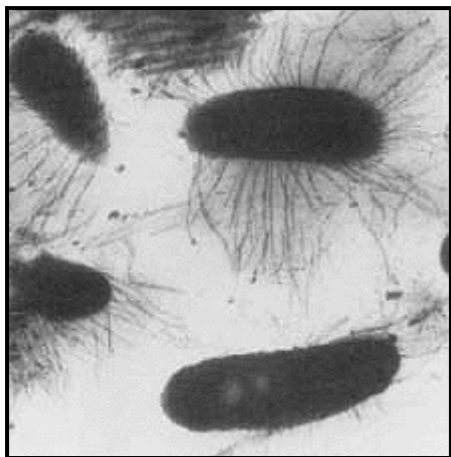




Contagious Equine Metritis:

Tawna Purcell, DVM

Contagious Equine Metritis (CEM) has been a recent topic of concern for many veterinarians and some owners as of late. CEM, caused by the bacteria *Taylorella equigenitalis*, was first discovered in England in 1977 and was first identified in the United States in 1978 (in Columbia, MO). The disease was eradicated at that time until it made a brief showing again in 2006 and once again in 2008. Efforts to eradicate the 2008 outbreak are still ongoing.



CEM is highly contagious. Horses are often asymptomatic (no outward sign of infection) although some affected mares can show a mucoid vaginal discharge.

Transmission can occur through direct breeding, artificial insemination of a mare from an infected stallion or contact with items contaminated with the bacteria. Infection results in infertility or abortion in mares, while stallions have no clinical signs. Infertility can last for one or more breeding cycles and certain mares can carry the infection, potentially spreading it to others for many months.

Since the 2008 outbreak was first identified in Kentucky, a number of stallions and a few mares have tested positive for CEM, however some 991 horses, spread over 48 states, have been identified as potentially exposed to the bacteria that causes CEM. Most of these horses have now been tested as negative and the few found positive have undergone, or are in the process of treatment.

Testing of CEM is done in partnership between local and state veterinarians to insure proper methods and future eradication. There are three diagnostic methods available, the most common being bacterial culture in both stallions and mares. Should a mare test positive for the bacteria, a blood test will be done to detect systemic antibodies. Stallions do not develop these antibodies. Stallions who have tested positive, or who have been on a farm with a positive stallion will often undergo a test breeding to negative mares to insure he does not infect them with the bacteria. The process takes 35 days to declare the stallion negative. On average the process to clear a horse takes 6-8 weeks between tests and re-tests.

Although it may seem cumbersome, both mares and stallions can be diagnosed and successfully treated with topical and systemic antibiotics. That along with good hygiene practices will help eradicate CEM from the US once again.