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FAST FACTS ABOUT  
**EQUINE ENCEPHALOMYELITIS**  
(Sleeping Sickness)

**DEFINITION**

ENCEPHALOMYELITIS (EASTERN, WESTERN, AND VENEZUELAN) ARE DISEASES OF THE HORSE'S CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM. WILD ANIMALS AND BIRDS ACTS AS HOSTS AND MOSQUITOES ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR SPREADING THE VIRUS TO HORSES. THE VIRUSES CAN ALSO INFECT HUMANS.

**CAUSE**

THE THREE FORMS (EEE, WEE, VEE) OF THIS DISEASE ARE CAUSED BY *ALPHAVIRUSES*.

**CLINICAL SIGNS**

INITIALLY, A SUBTLE CHANGE IN BEHAVIOR AND WITHIN A SHORT TIME, ANIMALS REFUSE TO EAT OR DRINK. FEVER AND DEPRESSION ALWAYS OCCUR AS THE CONDITION PROGRESSES. EVENTUALLY HORSES WILL EXHIBIT CIRCLING, BLINDNESS, HEAD-PRESSING, SEIZURES, AND OFTEN A DROOPING LIP. AS DISEASE PROGRESSES, PARALYSIS OCCURS AND THE ANIMAL BECOMES COMATOSE.

**DIAGNOSIS**

CLINICAL SIGNS AND THE ANIMAL BEING IN A GEOGRAPHIC AREA WHERE THESE DISEASES ARE PREVALENT DURING MOSQUITO SEASON. TESTS ON CEREBROSPINAL FLUID AND SERUM SAMPLES ARE USEFUL, BUT DEFINITIVE DIAGNOSIS CAN ONLY BE MADE ON POSTMORTEM EVALUATION.

**TREATMENT**

REST AND SUPPORTIVE NURSING CARE IS PRIMARY. MEDICATIONS TO REDUCE INFLAMMATION AND CONTROL SEIZURES ARE USEFUL. IV FLUID THERAPY IS OFTEN INDICATED.

**PROGNOSIS**

DEATH FROM EEE OCCURS IN 75% OF HORSES THAT DEVELOP NEUROLOGIC SIGNS, AND IN 15-30% OF THOSE WITH WEE. SURVIVORS SHOW GRADUAL IMPROVEMENT OVER WEEKS TO MONTHS, BUT COMPLETE RECOVERY IS RARE. HORSES THAT RECOVER OFTEN CONTINUE TO SHOW DEPRESSION, ABNORMAL BEHAVIOR, AND DIFFICULTY WALKING.

**PREVENTION**

VACCINATION AND INSECT CONTROL PROGRAMS.

**VACCINATION**

ANNUAL SPRING VACCINATION IS RECOMMENDED.

-Dr. Lyda W. Denney-