

Understanding Contagious Equine Metritis (CEM)



What Is CEM?

Contagious equine metritis (CEM) is a highly infectious venereal disease caused by the bacterium *Taylorella equigenitalis*. It primarily affects the reproductive system of mares, leading to vaginal discharge, temporary infertility, and, in some cases, long-term carrier states. Stallions can become silent carriers of the bacteria, transmitting disease through natural breeding or artificial insemination (AI), even when they exhibit no clinical signs.

Mares infected with CEM might clear the infection on their own, but many will develop chronic infections, continuing to harbor the bacteria in their reproductive tract. This makes them long-term sources of transmission to other horses. Foals born to infected mares might also become carriers.



Clinical Signs

The clinical signs of CEM in mares typically appear 10-14 days after exposure to the bacteria and include:

- Vaginal discharge.
- Temporary infertility.
- Abortion.
- Chronic infection.

Stallions are typically asymptomatic, showing no signs of illness but still capable of transmitting the disease.



Diagnosis

If a mare shows signs of CEM, the veterinarian will test her for *T. equigenitalis*. Ideally, breeding stallions should be tested at the beginning of each breeding season to reduce the risk of spreading disease.



Treatment and Management

Treatment for CEM involves both antibiotic therapy and strict biosecurity measures to prevent the spread of the disease. This includes regular cleaning and disinfecting of breeding equipment, stalls, and shared tools. Infected horses should not be bred until they are confirmed clear of the bacteria through follow-up testing.

Veterinarians recommend washing the affected horse's genitalia with a disinfectant soap such as 2% chlorhexidine, rinsing thoroughly, then applying a topical antibiotic such as nitrofurazone or silver sulfadiazine. Repeat these steps for five days.



When to Call Your Vet

Contact your veterinarian if you suspect that your horse might have been exposed to CEM or is showing clinical signs, such as vaginal discharge or failure to conceive after breeding—particular to an untested or imported stallion.