



What Is EIPH?

Exercise-induced pulmonary hemorrhage (EIPH) is a condition in which blood enters a horse's lungs during intense exercise due to extreme cardiovascular and respiratory pressures. It primarily affects racehorses and other performance horses engaged in high-speed activities, such as barrel racing. In some cases, underlying conditions such as equine asthma can contribute to the severity of EIPH, though EIPH itself does not appear to cause asthma.



Clinical Signs

The most well-known sign of EIPH is epistaxis (bleeding from the nostrils), but most affected horses do not show obvious external bleeding. More commonly, horses with EIPH exhibit subtle signs such as:

- Slowing down or stopping suddenly after a run.
- Coughing, especially after exercise.
- Reluctance to enter the arena or starting gate.
- Decreased performance or inconsistent effort.



Diagnosis

Veterinarians typically diagnose EIPH by performing an endoscopic examination of the trachea within 24 hours after intense exercise. The presence of blood in the trachea confirms the diagnosis, but not all affected horses bleed visibly into this area.

A more sensitive diagnostic tool is bronchoalveolar lavage (BAL), where fluid is introduced into the lungs and then retrieved for examination. If a horse has EIPH, the fluid will appear red-tinged due to the presence of blood. BAL testing can help identify cases that might otherwise go undetected.



Treatment and Management

The two most research-supported treatments for EIPH include:

- Furosemide (Lasix): A diuretic that lowers blood pressure in the lungs, reducing the likelihood of bleeding. Its use is regulated in some competitions.

- Nasal Strips: These help keep the nasal passages open, reducing airway resistance and lowering lung pressure during exercise.

Other supportive management strategies might include modifying training intensity, adjusting race schedules, and treating concurrent respiratory conditions such as asthma. Because EIPH is a progressive condition, repeated episodes can lead to lung scarring, which might eventually necessitate a career change for the horse.



When to Call Your Vet

If your horse is experiencing nosebleeds, coughing, or labored breathing after exercise, or if their speed or stamina has declined, contact your veterinarian for an evaluation. Prompt diagnosis and management can help preserve lung function and extend the horse's athletic career.