



What Is Equine Influenza?

Equine influenza is a highly contagious viral respiratory disease. The virus spreads rapidly through aerosolized droplets when infected horses cough or sneeze. It can also spread via contaminated equipment, clothing, and hands. Young horses, those with compromised immune systems, and animals frequently exposed to new horses—such as those traveling or competing—are especially vulnerable.



Clinical Signs

Signs of equine influenza typically appear within 1-3 days after exposure and might include:

- Fever.
- Dry, hacking cough.
- Nasal discharge (initially clear, might become thick and yellow).
- Lethargy.
- Loss of appetite.
- Muscle soreness or stiffness.

Some horses show only mild signs, while others can become quite ill. The severity often depends on the horse's age, immune status, and vaccination history.



Diagnosis

Veterinarians usually diagnose equine influenza based on clinical signs and history of exposure. However, confirmation often involves:

- Nasal swab and PCR test to detect the virus.
- ELISA (enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay).
- Serologic testing of blood samples to assess antibody levels.

Quick and accurate diagnosis is important for implementing biosecurity measures and preventing spread.



Treatment and Management

There is no specific antiviral cure for equine influenza, so treatment focuses on supportive care:

- **Rest:** Crucial for recovery. Horses should be rested for at least one week for every day of fever, often a total of 2-3 weeks.
- **Fluids and nutrition:** Ensure the horse stays hydrated and eats. Offer palatable, dust-free feed.
- **Anti-inflammatories:** NSAIDs like phenylbutazone might be prescribed to reduce fever and inflammation.
- **Isolation:** To prevent disease spread

in a barn, keep affected horses isolated for at least 14 days after clinical signs resolve.

- **Good ventilation:** Keep the horse's stall clean and well-ventilated to support respiratory healing.

Secondary bacterial infections can complicate recovery, in which case antibiotics might be needed.



When to Call Your Vet

Contact your veterinarian if:

- Your horse develops a persistent fever over 103°F.
- You notice thick, discolored nasal discharge.
- The horse becomes lethargic or refuses to eat.
- The cough worsens or doesn't improve after a few days.
- Multiple horses in your barn show signs of illness.
- Any horse on your property shows signs of respiratory disease.
- You have questions about smart biosecurity practices.

If your horse is at risk of exposure to influenza virus (e.g., travels off property, lives in a high-traffic barn), ask your veterinarian about vaccination, which is the main form of prevention.