



What Is Vesicular Stomatitis?

Vesicular stomatitis (VS) is a viral disease affecting horses, donkeys, mules, cattle, swine, and New World camelids. The disease is endemic in southern Mexico and is transmitted primarily by black flies, sand flies, and *Culicoides* biting midges. In winter months, climate and ecological factors create epidemic transmission into northern Mexico. The vectors then travel north into the U.S. In recent years, VS cases have developed in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Kansas, Oklahoma, Mississippi, California, and the Rocky Mountain region.

VS causes characteristic vesicular lesions in the form of blisters, crusts, and ulcerations on the lips, muzzle, nose, tongue, ears, sheath, teats, and coronary band. Because its symptoms resemble those of other serious diseases, such as foot-and-mouth disease in cattle and swine, it is a reportable disease requiring immediate veterinary attention.



Clinical Signs

Horses with vesicular stomatitis may exhibit the following signs:

- Vesicle formation leading to painful ulcerative lesions on the lips, muzzle, nostrils, and tongue, with the tongue being most severely affected.

- Ulceration of the inner lips.
- Crusting of the muzzle, nostrils, and inside the ears.
- Excessive salivation due to oral lesions.
- Difficulty picking up and chewing feed.
- Lameness due to painful erosions on the coronary band.
- Lesions on the udder, sheath, and inside the ear.
- Risk of secondary infections, leading to slow-healing wounds.
- Increased risk for animals on pasture.



Diagnosis

A veterinarian can make an initial diagnosis based on clinical signs and characteristic lesions. Laboratory testing is required to confirm the diagnosis, including detecting antibodies in serum samples or identifying the virus in fluid from active lesions. Since VS is a reportable disease, veterinarians must notify state or federal animal health officials, who will guide sample submission to an approved regulatory laboratory for definitive testing.



Treatment and Management

There is no specific treatment for vesicular stomatitis. Supportive care focuses on pain management and minimizing secondary infections.

Recommended approaches include:

- Administering pain relievers and anti-inflammatory medications as prescribed by your veterinarian.
- Providing soft, easily consumed feeds to avoid discomfort while eating.
- Keeping affected areas clean and monitoring for signs of infection.
- Implementing strict biosecurity measures to prevent disease spread.

All affected horses must be isolated, and the premises will be placed under quarantine until all animals have fully recovered and no active lesions remain. The State Veterinarian will work alongside the attending veterinarian to enforce appropriate quarantine and control measures.



When to Call Your Vet

If you notice any signs of vesicular stomatitis, such as blisters, ulcerations, excessive salivation, or lameness, contact your veterinarian immediately. Early detection is crucial to managing the disease, preventing its spread, and ensuring compliance with regulatory reporting requirements. Your veterinarian will help confirm the diagnosis, provide supportive care recommendations, and guide you through quarantine protocols if necessary.