

AN OUTBREAK OF EQUINE HERPESVIRUS AT THE HONG KONG JOCKEY CLUB STABLES

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A mixed equine herpesvirus (EHV-1) outbreak occurred in The Hong Kong Jockey Club's unvaccinated population of Thoroughbred racehorses at its centralised stabling and training complex at Sha Tin Racecourse. It was diagnosed by serological examination of paired sera samples at the Animal Health Trust, Newmarket, UK. EHV-1 was also diagnosed by agent isolation at The University of Hong Kong, Department of Microbiology. During the outbreak around 1,100 horses were stabled at Sha Tin and 228 (21%) were reported to be pyrexia. All cases were examined serologically; 198 were mixed EHV-1 and EHV-4, 14 were just EHV-1, 3 were just EHV-4 and 13 showed no significant seroconversions. Additionally, equine rhinovirus (ERV-1) was detected serologically in 70 of the herpesvirus cases and 5 cases had seroconverted to ERV-1 only.

The outbreak was extensive and clinically mild with all 26 training stables affected. The main sign

was pyrexia for 24 or 72 h and discharges or coughs were not a feature. One case was subjected to euthanasia because of neurological signs of posterior paresis; another case with mild neurological signs recovered. Movement of horses was banned between the racecourse and all riding schools which remained uninfected during the outbreak. Racing was affected only mildly by slightly decreased fields. The quarantine facilities for horses visiting from 6 countries for an international race in April 1997 were not affected and the race went ahead.

A vaccination programme against equine herpesvirus (EHV-1 and EHV-4) with boosters given every 6 months was instituted in June 1997 for all horses in Hong Kong. These include around 500 racehorses, hacks and ponies in 9 riding schools in the Special Administrative Region of China. Prior to vaccination, all the racehorses were surveyed serologically to ascertain the incidence of herpesvirus seroconversion during the outbreak.