

Equine influenza: Japanese outbreak in 2007

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On 15th August 2007 at the Miho Training Center (TC) located in Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan, a nasal swab sample taken from a febrile Thoroughbred racehorse reacted positive to the influenza A detection kit, (Kit; Fuji-revio, Japan). The nasal sample was sent to the Epizootic Research Center, Equine Research Institute, JRA, and subjected to an RT-PCR test to detect HA gene of equine influenza 2 virus (H3N8). Positive reaction with the RT-PCR confirmed the horse infected with equine influenza virus.

A movement ban was immediately ordered for horses and people at JRA racecourses and training centres where Thoroughbred and pleasure horses were present.

On 16th and 17th August, JRA conducted equine influenza examinations on 967 racehorses out of 4,235 stabled horses that had declared to race on the following weekend and 188 of 967 horses (19.4%) presented positive.

Although all these positive cases were subclinical, race meetings scheduled on 18th and 19th August, at Sapporo, Niigata and Kokura Racecourses were cancelled to prevent further outbreaks.

On 20th and 21st August, JRA conducted equine influenza examinations on 2,012 of 4,235 horses (47.5%) stabled at various JRA facilities that had declared to race on the following weekend. Of these, 181 (9.0%) presented positive which showed a substantial decrease from the examination conducted on 16th and 17th August. Based on this result, race meetings were resumed.

The number of febrile horse was maximum on 18th August with 96 horses on that day. However, the situation settled down within 2 weeks.

JRA race meetings and the movement of horses between JRA and non-JRA facilities were resumed on 25th August and 4th September, respectively, under strict conditions. The conditions for the horse movement were reduced gradually. However, sporadic occurrences of influenza are still observed in racehorses and in riding horse premises.

As of 31st December 2007, 736 horses (635 racehorses, 101 pleasure horses) were infected with equine influenza virus in JRA and 2,042 horses in 32 Prefectures were infected throughout Japan.