What is a Coggins Test?

A Coggins test is a blood test identifying if a horse is a carrier of Equine Infectious Anemia, a viral disease found in horses. A negative Coggins test is required for all travel between states and at most equine facilities.

Many horse owners have heard of a Coggins test, but some do not know what the test evaluates and why it is so important for the horse industry. A Coggins test is a blood test used to identify the presence of antibodies for Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA). Equine Infectious Anemia is a potentially fatal disease with no current treatment available. There are multiple tests to detect if a horse has EIA antibodies, but the Coggins test is the most popular and well known among horse industry professionals.

Performing a Coggins Test

To perform a Coggins test, a licensed veterinarian must draw blood from your horse and send it to an accredited lab for analysis. The lab will conduct a test to detect the EIA antibody (a protein that allows the body to recognize the EIA virus; this will only be present if the horse has had the EIA virus). They will then provide either a positive (antibody is present) or negative (antibody is not present) test result back to the veterinarian, who will share it with the horse owner. These results, often referred to as Coggins papers, will then be available as either a paper or electronic certificate and should be kept with the horse’s health records. The test results expire one year from the testing date.

The following information is generally found on all Coggins tests:

• **Owner information:** Owner name, address, phone number
• **Stable information:** Point of contact, address, phone number
• **Veterinarian Information:** Name, clinic, accreditation number, address
• **Horse's identifiable information:** Name, barn name, breed registration number, breed, sex, color, age, permanent identification (microchip, tattoo), pictures or drawings of all markings accompanied with a narrative description of markings
• **Equine infectious anemia (EIA) test information:** Type, lab that preformed the test, reason for testing, date received, date reported, and result

Obtaining a negative Coggins test is important to ensure that EIA is not spread to other horses. Lack of a vaccine or treatment for EIA makes testing crucial for preventing spread by ensuring carriers are not moved or allowed in close proximity with other horses.
What is Equine Infectious Anemia?

Equine Infectious Anemia is a bloodborne viral disease that can affect all equids. This virus is of great concern for the horse industry and there is currently no treatment or vaccine for it. Horses with EIA have varying symptoms and prognosis. Acute symptoms often include a fever, disorientation, and weight loss. Rapid death has also been reported for some horses with EIA. Most often, horses with EIA are asymptomatic carriers, showing no signs or symptoms, which is one of the reasons testing is so important. Horses positive for EIA are life-long carriers and pose a risk to any other horse they may be around. Therefore, EIA carriers must be permanently quarantined, being kept at least 200 yards away from other horses, or be euthanized.

Transmission of EIA

Most often EIA is transmitted by biting flies; tabanids (horse and deer flies) are considered the most significant transmitters. Biting flies transmit EIA by taking a blood meal from an EIA carrier and then transmitting that infected blood to a non-infected horse. Since it is relatively impossible to eliminate blood-sucking insects around horses, there is always the potential of a horse contracting EIA (and other bloodborne diseases) when in the vicinity of an infected horse. Other modes of transmission of EIA include use of contaminated equipment, such as used needles and syringes, mare to foal transmission in-utero, and through natural breeding of mares and stallions.

Reducing the Spread of Equine Infectious Anemia

Obtaining a negative Coggins test ensures that the horse does not have the antibody for EIA at the time of testing. However, it is encouraged that you continue to implement biosecurity measures in addition to the annual test. Since EIA is primarily transmitted by flies, employing fly management strategies can help reduce likelihood of infection. Horse owners are encouraged to use an integrated pest management (IPM) system, which uses multiple, targeted strategies to reduce fly populations. Learn about recommendations for horse farm specific IPM.
Prioritizing horse health and sanitation can also help reduce spread. Always use a sterile needle when giving your horse an injection. If using a multi-dose vaccine bottle, use a sterile needle every time you puncture the bottle. Require proof of a negative Coggins for horses coming onto your farm and/or interacting with your horse. For new horses entering the premises, quarantine them for at least fourteen days after arrival, evaluating them for signs of illness during that time. Require proof of a negative Coggins test for horses you are considering buying or breeding. The American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) also recommends that horse owners only participate in shows that require a negative Coggins.

It is always recommended that horse owners regularly evaluate their horses for signs of illness. If you suspect your horse has contracted EIA or any other virus, separate them from other horses to reduce chances of transmission and contact a veterinarian immediately.

Coggins Test Requirements

Traveling Out of and Into Pennsylvania

Proof of a negative Coggins test is required for horses traveling interstate and for some intrastate movement. Currently, all states require proof of a negative Coggins test for horses crossing a state line. For Pennsylvania, it is required that all horses entering the Commonwealth be accompanied by a negative Coggins from within 12 months prior to requested date of entry. There is an exception for foals entering the Commonwealth, which do not need a test if they are under 6 months and are accompanied by a dam with a negative test result.

Pennsylvania and many other states also have additional requirements for interstate travel, such as a current Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (CVI). Be sure to identify both destination state(s) and home state requirements before leaving to ensure you can enter new states and reenter your own without issue.

Horse Shows and Other Equine Facilities

Many horse shows and facilities require that a negative Coggins test be provided for the horse to enter the premises or participate at the event. It is encouraged that all horse shows and facilities require proof of a negative Coggins from competitors upon entry. Similarly, horse owners are encouraged to only participate at shows that have this requirement. Horses that are being sold, entering sales, or newly purchased should also be required to have a current negative Coggins test.

Conclusion

Obtaining a Coggins test annually is imperative to reduce risk of EIA transmission. As most carriers of EIA are asymptomatic, testing can help identify carriers and prevent transmission to other horses. Any time you plan to travel with your horse, make sure you explore documentation requirements for that state, facility, and event before departing. Additionally, make sure that a current negative Coggins is available for any horse you plan to purchase or sell.

For more information on Coggins and EIA, visit:

American Association of Equine Practitioners - Equine Infectious Anemia
UC Davis Veterinary Medicine - Equine Infectious Anemia

The content of this presentation, including text, graphics, and images, is educational only and not intended to be a substitute for veterinary medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of a licensed doctor of veterinary medicine or other licensed or certified veterinary medical professional with any questions you may have regarding a veterinary medical condition or symptom.

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Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences research and extension programs are funded in part by Pennsylvania counties, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.