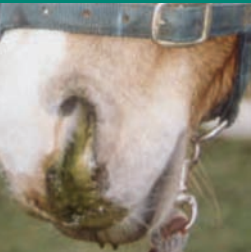


AHT Equine



Equine Influenza Surveillance

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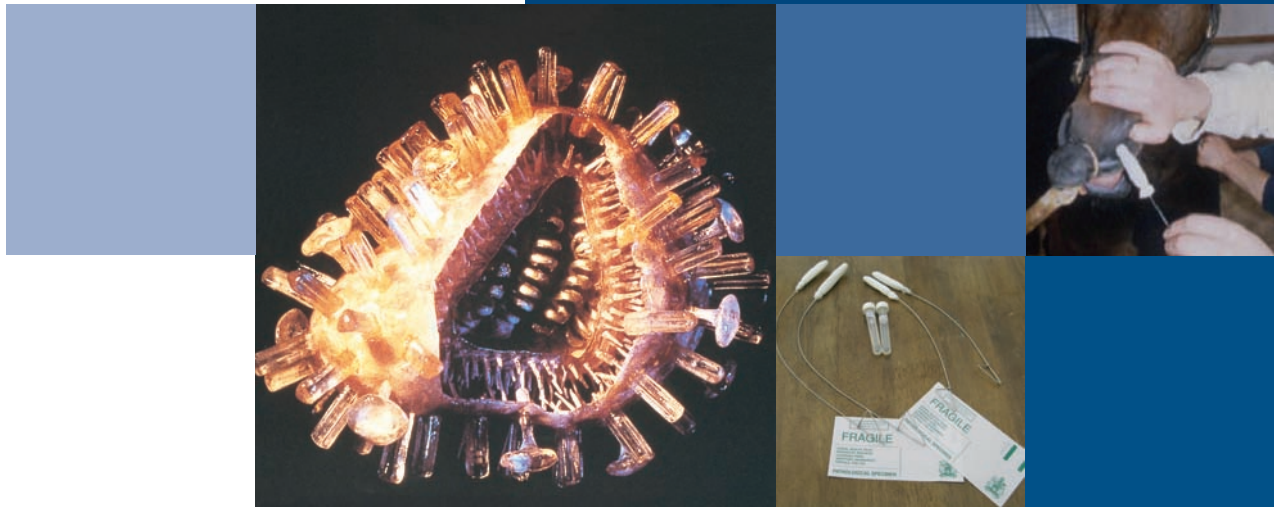


Equine Influenza

Surveillance

AHT

Equine



The Animal Health Trust has long been renowned for its work on the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of equine infectious diseases. In particular, we have focused on monitoring and surveillance and, with funding from the Horserace Betting Levy Board, we have established a programme for detailed surveillance of equine influenza in the United Kingdom. To enhance the achievements of this programme we have developed a sentinel practice scheme through which equine veterinary practitioners throughout the UK participate and contribute to our overall surveillance endeavours. This scheme is kindly supported by Schering-Plough Animal Health.

Practices which become members of the scheme are supplied with nasopharyngeal swabs and virus transport medium, and are asked to submit swabs taken from horses suspected of having influenza to our diagnostic unit where the samples will be tested free of charge for the presence of equine influenza using our NP ELISA. The results of this test are then reported back to the submitting veterinary practice.

If the sample proves positive, this sets in motion a chain of events which starts with our disease surveillance veterinarians contacting other equine veterinary practices in the area that the virus was isolated, alerting them to the presence of influenza in their region, and offering advice and guidance in an outbreak situation.

The positive sample is then passed on to members of our research team, who attempt to isolate and grow the virus for characterisation. This characterisation is carried out both antigenically, to look at how antibodies raised against particular strains behave towards the new isolate, and genetically to enable the comparison of the virus's genome against previous strains and the current vaccine strains.

This characterisation allows us to monitor the evolution of the virus and to provide the OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health) with the relevant data to decide whether an update of the vaccine strains is necessary.

The findings from our investigations into the new isolate are reported back to the submitting practice, and members of the scheme are kept up to date by the publication of our frequent newsletters. Each new isolate is also reported on our surveillance website www.equiflunet.org.uk, which forms a network with other equine influenza diagnostic and research laboratories worldwide, aiding the global surveillance of equine influenza.

The veterinarians in the field, who submit samples to us, play a crucial role in our surveillance of equine influenza and, ultimately, in ensuring that available vaccines contain the most appropriate strains.

Veterinary practitioners who are interested in learning more about our surveillance programme, or would like to join the sentinel practice scheme, should e-mail info@equiflunet.org.uk or telephone Adam Rash on 08700 502460.