

TICK FEVER

WHAT IS IT?

Tick Fever (or equine granulocytic ehrlichiosis), is an infectious, non-contagious, seasonal disease that primarily occurs in fall and winter. It affects horses throughout northern California and other States with similar climates. This disease is caused by a rickettsial agent initially termed *Ehrlichia equi*, but now is referred to as *Anaplasma phagocytophilum*. It is different from the cattle form of anaplasmosis, but can be found in other species. It is spread to horses from ticks, especially the deer tick, *Ixodes sp.* Rickettsial infections are caused by an unusual type of bacteria that can live only inside the cells of another organism. It can take from 1-3 weeks after exposure to develop the disease.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS?

Signs may be mild to severe and include: fever (from 101.0 to 106.5 F), depression, lethargy, mild limb edema, ataxia, anorexia, reluctance to move, petechiation (small blood vessel ruptures on the gums), and jaundice. The fevers are usually the highest in the first 1-3 days of infection, but may persist for about 6-12 days from infection. Sometimes heart vessel inflammation can cause temporary arrhythmias.

DIAGNOSIS?

Primary clinical signs are a high fever (104 or greater) combined with jaundice. Three other tests include: 1.) A blood panel, which can indicate a low white blood cell count, 2.) A blood smear can sometimes show morula in the white blood cells, or 3.) A PCR test can find if the organism is present in the horse.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT?

Tetracycline is the medicine of choice. The most successful treatment method is intravenous Oxytetracycline once daily for 3 days. Other options include Minocycline or Doxycycline oral antibiotics for 2 weeks but may be less successful. However, with any treatment a relapse could occur.

Some evidence suggests that infected horses could be immune for 2 years or more and are not carriers of the disease. There is no current vaccine.

MONITORING/SUPPORTIVE CARE

Even after your horse is treated you should monitor its temperature rectally twice a day. It should be less than 101 F. Monitor your horse's appetite, attitude, fecal output and urination. A sick horse can easily become dehydrated and colic. Feeding green grass, mashes, and electrolytes can help encourage hydration. On rare occasion antibiotics can cause diarrhea which can be a serious side effect. If possible give your horse a probiotic while on antibiotics. Call us if your horse continues to have a fever, goes off feed, or develops diarrhea.

Please feel free to call us with any questions!
Auburn Equine / AMC Large Animal Services
530-823-0162

