



*The WeCAHN Equine Network held a quarterly videoconference meeting on September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025. The network members discussed the animal health events from April to June 2025. Veterinary practitioners, diagnosticians, veterinary college faculty, researchers, and industry representatives attended the meeting.*

## 1) Overview

Data sources in this report include:

1. Clinical Impressions Surveys completed by network practitioners: how often they encountered specific conditions.
2. Data shared by western veterinary diagnostic laboratories: Manitoba Veterinary Diagnostic Services (VDS), Prairie Diagnostic Services (PDS), and University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine Diagnostic Services Unit (UCVM DSU).
3. Scan: Other sources – such as national disease monitoring networks and international alerts.

## 2) Interesting Cases

### Clinical case: Traumatic tracheal tear

One of the most memorable cases this quarter involved a 9-year-old Thoroughbred event horse that was found with swelling under its skin around the head and neck. His young rider noticed “air under the skin,” which led the veterinarian to diagnose **subcutaneous emphysema**—air trapped beneath the skin layers. The vet and owners did not see any wounds or injuries.

Veterinary examination using an endoscope found a **small tear in the trachea (windpipe)**, likely caused by blunt trauma. The horse was treated with rest, bandaging, antibiotics, anti-inflammatory medication, and recovered fully. No follow up endoscopy was done due to financial constraints.

This case is a reminder of how even seemingly small or invisible injuries can cause unusual symptoms—and why early veterinary assessment is essential.



### 3) Syndromic Surveillance

#### Important information:

#### Clinical impressions surveys

Quarterly surveys are completed by network practitioners. Answers:  
**Never**; **Rarely** = 1-2 times per 3 months; **Commonly** = 1-2 times per month;  
**Very frequently** = 3+ times per month.

#### Infectious diseases

Overall, there were no major horse disease outbreaks in Western Canada this spring.

Serious contagious diseases such as West Nile virus, Eastern and Western Equine Encephalitis, Equine Infectious Anemia, and Equine Protozoal Myeloencephalitis were either *not seen* or *very rare*.

**Strangles**, a common bacterial respiratory infection in horses, was occasionally reported but stayed within normal levels.

#### Heart problems

Heart issues were reported **Never** to **Rarely**. A few cases of murmurs and arrhythmias (abnormal heart rhythm) were noted and one case of congestive heart failure was diagnosed at the Calgary diagnostic lab.

#### Congenital issues (i.e. present at birth)

**Birth defects** were **Rare**, though veterinarians did report some foals with crooked legs, hernias, or early birth (prematurity). These continue to be part of normal background cases rather than a wider trend.

#### Skin issues

Skin problems varied from **Rarely** to **Very frequently**. Allergies and itchy skin were **Common**. Bacterial infections involving several *Staphylococcus* species were found more often than usual at Saskatchewan's diagnostic lab. **Lice and ticks** were occasionally seen, particularly on young or pleasure horses. **Skin tumors** such as sarcoids and melanomas were diagnosed at normal rates.

#### Digestive system disease

Digestive problems continue to be one of the most common health concerns in horses.



## Stomach Ulcers

Veterinarians reported that gastric ulcers remain widespread—particularly among performance horses. Owners are becoming more aware of ulcer prevention, such as feeding before travel or exercise and using alfalfa or omega-3 fatty acids to buffer stomach acid. However, many horses are still being treated long-term with omeprazole, often in compounded (custom-made) forms.

**Practitioners noted:** Some compounded products may not work as well as expected. New injectable forms of omeprazole show promise but can cause injection-site swelling. Stomach ulcers often return if treatment is stopped abruptly. Dietary management, omega-3 supplementation, and stress reduction remain important parts of prevention.

**Tip:** talk to swine veterinarians and pig owners as stomach ulcers are also common in pigs.

## Colic and Other Digestive Diseases

Mild colic and impaction were fairly common this spring, though serious cases were rare.

Foal diarrhea was seen occasionally, but no particular pathogens—such as *Salmonella* or *Clostridium*—were found in higher numbers than usual. Labs also reported a few cases of Tyzzer's disease in foals, a serious liver infection that occurs sporadically in Western Canada

## Other systems

### Reproductive Health

Reproductive issues were moderate to common this quarter. Most cases were uterine infections (endometritis) in mares, while abortions remained uncommon.

No contagious reproductive diseases such as Contagious Equine Metritis or Equine Viral Arteritis were found.

A few cases of rare bacteria (*Arcanobacterium* and *Corynebacterium*) were seen in reproductive samples, but they were not considered major causes of illness.



## Respiratory Health

Respiratory disease continues to be one of the most frequent reasons for veterinary visits.

Environmental factors like dust from round bales, pollen, and wildfire smoke contribute heavily to equine asthma and other airway problems.

- Horses exposed to dusty feed or poor air quality often develop chronic coughs or breathing issues.
- Treatment usually includes steroids (such as dexamethasone) and inhaled medications (like fluticasone or ciclesonide), sometimes combined with bronchodilators for better breathing.
- The best prevention is improving air quality and reducing dust exposure.

A few cases of Strangles and Herpesvirus (EHV-1 and EHV-4) were confirmed in labs, but numbers remained within normal range.

## Neurological and Musculoskeletal Issues

Neurological and movement-related problems were also observed. Common reports included stringhalt, head-shaking, and wobbler syndrome.

Muscle and joint injuries were frequent, especially among performance horses.

## Trauma and Welfare

Injuries from accidents, kicks, or transportation were common, though most were minor.

Some practitioners noted a small number of nutrition-related weight loss cases, but overall horse body condition remained good.

## 4) Scan - Emerging and External Disease Alerts

### West Nile Virus and Other Vector-Borne Diseases

Between April and June 2025, Western Canada saw small numbers of West Nile Virus (WNV) cases in horses: 2 in Alberta, 9 in Saskatchewan, 2 in Manitoba. Human cases were seen mostly in Ontario and Quebec.

British Columbia and Saskatchewan had one case each of Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA).

No Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) in Western Canada. Cases were seen in ON and QC.

Veterinarians urge horse owners to continue vaccinating against WNV and to reduce mosquito exposure during summer.

Some owners in Saskatchewan hesitated to test for WNV, fearing government quarantine similar to EIA, but this is a misunderstanding. WNV is not subject to quarantine, and early treatment gives horses a better chance of recovering.



### New World Screwworm: An International Concern

One of the most significant alerts this quarter came from Central America and Mexico, where the New World Screwworm (NWS) fly has resurged dramatically.

- In Panama, cases jumped from 25 in 2022 to over 6,000 in 2023.
- By mid-2025, the parasite had spread North to Mexico, infecting livestock and wildlife.

Female screwworm flies lay eggs in open wounds from warm-blooded beings (including humans), and the larvae feed on living flesh, causing severe pain and even death if untreated.

**Can this parasite reach Canada?** Experts say it's *unlikely* to become established because of Canada's cold winters, but isolated summer cases could appear in animals returning from affected regions.

**Treatment:** All larvae must be removed manually and wounds cleaned, disinfected and protected using a larvicide + repellent.

- Larvicide products (like Negasunt<sup>®</sup>, used in Latin America) are effective but not licensed in Canada.
- Ivermectin and antibiotics can help but won't kill larvae inside wounds.
- Veterinarians and owners should be alert for unusual wound infestations and report any suspicious cases immediately.

#### Prevention:

- Inspect imported horses and other animals carefully.
- Follow strict wound care and biosecurity procedures, especially after travel.
- Work with your veterinarian for treatment guidance.



## 5) Education and Resources

Equine Guelph and the Canadian Animal Health Surveillance System (CAHSS) released updated resources:

- “Be Pro-active Rather than Reactive with Biosecurity” by Equine Guelph ([LINK](#))
- [Ticks and Your Horse: Types of Ticks and Tick-Borne Diseases](#)
- [Preventing and Responding to Ticks and Tick Bites on Your Horse](#)
- [Ticks and Horses - Tick Guide](#)

These documents are free and available online to help owners understand risks and protect their horses.

## 6) Key Takeaways

1. Air quality and environmental management to lower exposure to dust and smoke are key in preventing asthma and airway inflammation.
2. Gastric Ulcers are still a top issue. Prevention through management and verified medications works best, talk to your veterinarian about treatment options.
3. West Nile Virus testing is key to start your horse on early treatment and give it a better chance of recovering. Horses are not quarantined in Canada due to WNV.
4. Stay alert for emerging health risks like the New World Screwworm. Educate those around you about wound inspection and care. Be suspicious of unusual wounds and work with your veterinarian.

Financial support was provided under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative.

