



The WeCAHN Equine Network held a quarterly videoconference meeting on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2026. Network members discussed the animal health events from October to December 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.
2. Data shared by western veterinary diagnostic laboratories: Manitoba Veterinary Diagnostic Services (VDS) laboratory, Prairie Diagnostic Services (PDS) laboratory, and University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine Diagnostic Services Unit (UCVM DSU).
3. Scan: equine surveillance reported by other sources or networks.



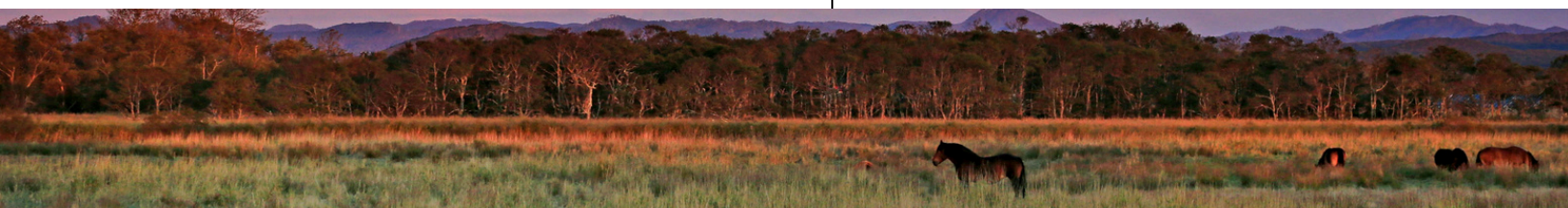
## 2) Interesting Cases

### Suspected liver-related neurologic disease

- A 20 year old miniature mare became very lethargic during transport between Alberta and British Columbia and was initially thought to have colic.
- The mare developed worsening neurologic signs, including disorientation, circling, and vision loss. Her travelling companions were unaffected.
- Blood testing showed severe liver damage, with no signs of infection.
- The horse was euthanized due to poor prognosis, and no post-mortem was performed.
- This case shows how rapidly severe liver disease can progress and the limits of diagnosis without post-mortem testing.

### Eye disease with suspected immune disorder

- A 22-year-old miniature mare presented with an eye injury that did not improve after treatment and later developed bleeding inside the eye.
- The horse became thin and showed signs of widespread bleeding, including from the nose and from injection sites.
- Blood tests showed low red blood cells and very low platelets, suggesting a possible immune-related condition.
- The horse was euthanized, but no post-mortem was done to confirm the cause.
- This case highlights how some seemingly minor conditions can be sign of widespread disease and how difficult it is to confirm without further testing.



### Sudden respiratory distress and suspected cancer

- An older Quarter Horse gelding developed sudden breathing difficulty that worsened quickly.
- The horse showed abnormal breathing sounds and lab results suggested changes in white blood cells.
- The horse died suddenly during transport to a referral center, with no clear cause identified.
- Cancer was suspected but not confirmed due to lack of post-mortem.
- This case highlights how quickly serious internal disease can progress without obvious early signs.

### Rapid neurologic disease of unclear cause

- A 15-year-old sport horse went from normal activity to severe neurologic disease within one week.
- Signs included abnormal movement, loss of appetite, and worsening brain and nerve-related symptoms.
- Testing ruled out common viral causes, and post-mortem showed severe brain and spinal cord inflammation.
- A protozoal organism (*Sarcocystis bertrami*) was detected, but its role in disease is unclear.
- This case identified an organism uncommonly related to neurological disease. Investigation is ongoing highlighting the educational value of postmortem examinations.

### Winter tick-borne disease

- Several horses developed fever, diarrhea, and mild neurologic and breathing problems during winter in Manitoba.
- Cases were confirmed by PCR as anaplasmosis which a tick-borne disease.
- Ticks were observed even in very cold conditions, an unusual pattern.
- This finding highlights a possible shift in vector patterns and the need for year-round awareness of tick exposure.



### Discussion: value and perceived barriers to equine post-mortems

Many recent cases were not fully diagnosed because post-mortem exams were not done, which makes it harder to understand disease risks and causes. Common reasons include cost, discomfort with the procedure, preference to bury horses at home, and less interest in answers after the horse has died. Owners are more likely to pursue testing when they think a disease could spread to other horses.

Access also plays a role, with more post-mortems done near the diagnostic lab in British Columbia and through programs like the University of Calgary Diagnostic Services Unit that offer free exams for student cases. When transport isn't possible, veterinarians can sometimes collect samples on-farm, but this option is not always accepted by owners. Insurance cases often require a post-mortem, and owners usually cover the cost.

Education and financial support can improve participation. For example, the American Endurance Ride Conference offers a subsidy and promotes post-mortems as important for protecting horse health and the sport. Experience in Saskatchewan shows that owners are more likely to proceed when costs are reduced or when answers are especially important, such as during outbreaks or unexplained deaths.



### 3) Syndromic and Laboratory Surveillance

#### Important information

##### Clinical impression surveys

**Never**; **Rarely** = 1-2 times per 3 months; **Commonly** = 1-2 times per month; **Very frequently** = 3+ times per month.

##### 'Control charts'

Control charts are a simple way of presenting data collected over time (e.g., increasing or decreasing detection frequencies). Each data point reflects the number of positive samples or cases reported by a diagnostic laboratory over 3 months (quarter of a year). The upper and lower horizontal lines are called control limits. Individual points lying outside the control limits (special cause or unstable point) suggest a need for investigation to determine whether/how significant a signal they represent.

#### Infectious diseases

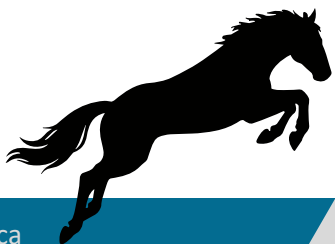
Infectious diseases were generally reported **Rarely** and remained **stable**, with strangles (*Streptococcus equi* subsp. *equi*) reported from **Never** to **Commonly** and **increasing** in some areas, while most other infectious diseases were **Never** reported.

No laboratory data indicating unusual activity or results outside control limits were reported for infectious diseases.

#### Cardiovascular system disease

Heart-related disease was reported **Never** to **Rarely** and was **stable**.

A single case of a heart defect was identified at post-mortem, and this was considered an isolated finding within expected limits.



#### Dermatological disease

Skin conditions were reported **Rarely** to **Commonly** and were generally **stable**, including bacterial infections and external parasites.

Lice, ticks, and itchy skin cases were **Never** to **Rarely** reported and **increasing** in some groups, while sarcoids were reported **Rarely** and **stable**.

Laboratory results showed skin tumors such as sarcoids and other cancers within expected levels, with sarcoids decreasing over time. Bacteria including *Staph aureus*, *Corynebacterium pseudotuberculosis*, and other common organisms were identified, all within normal limits and consistent with localized infections.

#### Digestive system disease

Digestive issues were reported **Commonly** to **Very frequently** and were generally **stable**, with dental problems and stomach issues such as ulcers **commonly** noted.

Colic was reported **Commonly** to Very frequently, with some types showing increasing trends, while diarrhea was **Never** to **Commonly** reported and stable overall.

Parasites, especially strongyles, were reported **Rarely** to **Commonly** and were **increasing** in some groups, while other parasites were **Never** reported and **stable**.

Laboratory results showed colitis and other digestive conditions within expected levels, including cases of intestinal twisting and inflammation. Bacteria such as *Actinobacillus equuli*, *Clostridium perfringens*, and *Enterococcus* species were found at expected levels with no unusual increases.

### Multisystemic disease

Whole-body illnesses were reported **Never** to **Commonly** and were generally **stable**, with fever of unknown cause reported **Commonly** to **Very frequently**.

Conditions such as immune-related disease and cancers were reported **Never** to **Commonly** and remained stable.

Laboratory findings included cases of *Anaplasma phagocytophilum* and also different types of tumors, all occurring at expected levels without signs of increase.

### Musculoskeletal system disease

Muscle and bone problems were reported **Very frequently** and were **stable**. Laboratory findings included fractures and a case of laminitis with *Sarcocystis* spp., all within expected levels.

### Neurological system disease

Neurologic conditions were reported **Never** to **Commonly** and were **stable**, with conditions such as head shaking and coordination issues **commonly** noted.

A small number of encephalitis cases were identified, with no indication of increased activity.

### Reproductive system disease

Reproductive issues were reported **Rarely** to **Commonly** and were **stable**, with few clinical reports of abortion.

Laboratory results identified some unexplained abortions and isolated cases such as uterine infection, all within expected levels.

### Respiratory system disease

Respiratory disease was reported **Commonly** and was generally **stable**, including both infectious and non-infectious causes such as asthma.

Strangles and viral infections were reported **Never** to **Commonly** and were **stable** to **increasing** in some areas.

Laboratory testing identified equine herpesvirus and *Streptococcus equi* bacteria, as well as *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, all within expected limits without unusual increases.

### Trauma, injury or welfare-related issues

Injuries and welfare concerns were reported **Commonly** and were **stable**, including wounds and fractures



## 4) Scan of emerging and other important diseases

A small number of new equine infectious anemia (EIA) cases were confirmed in Alberta, while most ongoing cases were linked to known infected properties, showing controlled spread through follow-up testing. Strangles cases were reported in British Columbia triggering concerns and vaccination uptake due to typically low disease levels in the region.

Highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 continues to spread in poultry and wild birds in both Canada the US. No new cases were reported in dairy cattle in the US in the last month.

In the Netherlands, suspected HPAI H5N1 cross-species exposure was noted, when investigation of ill and dead cats on a farm led to detection of antibodies in milk from the farm cows.

A study in cats in Poland, showed that H5N1 causes rapid, severe illness with high death rates, making cats a potential early warning sign for disease on farms.



### Owner take aways

- Some serious horse illnesses could not be fully diagnosed because post-mortem exams were not done, which makes it harder to understand disease risks.
- Post-mortems are still not commonly done due to cost, emotional concerns, and logistics, but they are more likely to happen when financial support and education are available.
- Strangles and EIA remain important diseases to watch for, even though most other reportable diseases are seen less often.
- Digestive problems like colic, stomach ulcers, and dental issues continue to be common, and some illnesses such as anaplasmosis still require attention.
- New concerns include tick-borne diseases and highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1, with cats potentially showing early signs of infection on farms.

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