



The WeCAHN Equine Network held a quarterly videoconference meeting on September 18th, 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. Data were synthesized from clinical impression surveys completed by practitioners and laboratory submissions from Prairie Diagnostic Services (PDS), Manitoba Veterinary Diagnostic Services (VDS), and the University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine Diagnostic Services Unit (UCVM DSU).

1) Interesting cases

Clinical case: Traumatic tracheal tear

A 9-year-old Thoroughbred event horse was found with a swollen head and neck. His young rider noticed “air under the skin,” and veterinarian diagnosed subcutaneous emphysema—air trapped beneath the skin layers. No external injuries or wounds were seen. Using an endoscope, the vet observed a small tear in the trachea (windpipe), likely caused by blunt trauma. The horse was treated with rest, bandaging, anti-inflammatory medication, and antibiotics, and recovered fully. This case is a reminder of how even seemingly small or invisible injuries can cause unusual symptoms—and why early veterinary assessment is essential.



2) Veterinary and laboratory results

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 was occasionally reported.

Digestive problems continue to be one of the most common health concerns in horses. This quarter, veterinarians reported that gastric ulcers remain widespread—particularly among performance horses. Ulcer prevention involves management and nutrition strategies (e.g. feed prior to stress, supplement with Omega-3 fatty acids). However, many horses are still maintained on long-term omeprazole. **Tip:** talk to swine veterinarians and pig owners as stomach ulcers are also common in pigs.

Mild colic and impaction were also common this spring, though serious cases were rare. Foal diarrhea was seen occasionally, but no particular pathogens (*Salmonella* or *Clostridium*) were found in higher numbers. Labs also reported a few cases of Tyzzer's disease in foals.

Respiratory illness remains a leading cause of veterinary visits in horses. Poor air quality—due to dust in round bales, pollen, or wildfire smoke—often triggers equine asthma and chronic coughing. Treatment commonly involves corticosteroids and inhaled therapies, sometimes paired with bronchodilators, while prevention focuses on reducing dust and improving ventilation. Laboratory findings confirmed only a few cases of Strangles and equine herpesvirus (EHV-1 and EHV-4), with no unusual increases reported.

Few heart issues were seen this quarter with a few cases of murmurs and arrhythmias (abnormal heart rhythm) noted.

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. Birth defects were rare, a few foals had crooked legs, hernias, or early birth (prematurity). These continue to be part of normal background cases rather than a wider trend.

Skin problems were more common, especially allergies and itchy skin. Bacterial infections with *Staphylococcus* were found more often than usual at Saskatchewan's diagnostic lab. **Lice and ticks** were occasionally seen on young or pleasure horses. Skin tumors such as sarcoids and melanomas were diagnosed at normal rates.

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.

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.



3) Scan - Emerging and External Disease Alerts

West Nile Virus and Other Vector-Borne Diseases

Western Canada saw small numbers of **WNV** cases in horses (2 in Alberta, 9 in Saskatchewan, 2 in Manitoba). Human cases were mainly in Ontario and Quebec.

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

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 to recover.

New World Screwworm

The New World Screwworm, a fly whose larvae eat live flesh, has moved north from South America into Central America and Mexico. Cases increased dramatically from 25 in 2022 to 6,500 in 2023 in Panama, with the first Mexican cases in late 2024. Although the parasite is unlikely to survive Canadian winters, it could appear in imported or traveling animals during summer months. Treatment requires physically removing larvae, cleaning wounds, and using special larvicide products. Animal owners and caregivers should check animals returning from affected areas (e.g. Mexico) and contact a veterinarian immediately if suspicious wounds are found.

Other 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](#)

4) Key Takeaways for Horse Owners

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 to recover. 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.

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