

BHS West Midlands Region Welfare Report

15 February 2010



The British Horse Society
Registered Charity No. 210504

Compiled by Lisa Randle, County/Regional Welfare Officer

General summary

Over the winter there has been a general slight increase in the number of welfare cases dealt with. This is likely to be due to the freezing temperatures, snow and general heavy rainfall that has been experienced over the winter months. All of the cases dealt with have been resolved satisfactorily.

Equine infectious anaemia ('Swamp' fever)

In January there were reports concerning two horses in Wiltshire that were humanely destroyed having tested positive for antibodies against Equine Infectious Anaemia. BHS Headquarters were quick to give reassuring information to horse owners about the disease.

EIA is spread by insect vectors infected with the EIA virus (or potentially contaminated veterinary equipment so unlikely in the UK) NOT by close contact between horses. Insects do not survive cold weather well, so we have some reason to thank the cold weather! The cold snap will have ensured that few insect vectors are about and those that have survived the cold will not fly far.

The two animals that tested positive were imported into this country and there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that EIA has been successfully transmitted within the UK. The two affected horses have now been destroyed so they are not acting as a reservoir to potentially infect others.

The fact that these horses were identified, before they developed clinical signs, demonstrates that import checks are working. Restrictions are in place at the premises where the horses were identified and DEFRA are conducting an investigation into the incident.

EIA is a serious disease but all indications are that this incidence has been contained and the treat level to other equines is small.

Hyperflexion – BHS viewpoint

The BHS official standpoint on the use of hyperflexion in the training of horses is reproduced below:

The British Horse Society strongly recommends that all riders training horses on the flat and over fences should adhere to the official instruction handbook of the German National Equestrian Federation. Whilst we appreciate that horses are as individual as humans, and that some may require corrective schooling, the BHS's stand on hyperflexion (by which we mean the extreme flexion of the horse's head and neck beyond normal limits) remains clear: it is an unacceptable method of training horses by any rider for any length of time.

We recognise that the scientific evidence is conflicting, and likely to remain so as each party seeks determinedly to prove its case. For this reason we doubt that science will ever provide a single, clear, unambiguous and unarguable answer. It therefore falls to humans to do what the horses cannot, namely to follow the precautionary principle: as nature provides no evidence of horses choosing to move in hyperflexion for an extended period of time; and as hyperflexion can create tension in the horse's neck and back which has no justifying necessity; and as the horse in hyperflexion is, by definition, unable fully to use its neck; and as the psychological consequences of such treatment remain latent (perhaps in an analogous position with horses which are whipped aggressively but which can still pass a five star vetting), we should take all appropriate steps to discourage the use of this training technique, for the horse's sake.

(For further information, please contact: Alison Coleman, The British Horse Society, 01926 707737 or a.coleman@bhs.org.uk)

Horse tax petition

During November details of the online petition against DEFRA imposing a tax on horse owners was circulated. This campaign continues and the petition can be found at <http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/Horse-Rethink/sign>

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