



2024 Equine Piroplasmosis (EP) Annual Report

Background

Equine piroplasmosis (EP) is a foreign animal disease in the United States and is immediately reportable to state and federal animal health officials. The disease can be contracted by any equid (horses, donkeys, mules, or zebra) and is caused by infection with blood-borne parasites, either *Theileria equi* or *Babesia caballi*. While natural tick-borne transmission of the disease is not currently present on the U.S. mainland, sporadic cases of iatrogenic transmission (human-caused by medical procedures) in high-risk populations, such as Quarter Horse racehorses, are being documented.

Unhygienic practices being used by horse owners and trainers in this high-risk population are contributing to disease spread and include the re-use of needles, syringes, and intravenous administration sets between horses, administration of illegal blood products from other countries, direct blood transfusion between horses to increase athletic performance (blood doping), and administration of multi-dose drug products that have become blood-contaminated by non-sterile handling techniques between horses. In addition to transmitting EP between horses, these practices are concurrently transmitting other blood-borne equine diseases, such as equine infectious anemia (EIA). A source of continued EP incursion into the U.S. is the illegal movement of horses from EP-endemic regions, such as Mexico.

Active surveillance for EP occurs in the U.S. through testing to enter sanctioned racetracks, export, interstate movement, and diagnostic testing. Traceback and cohort testing on all exposed horses is conducted in response to any EP-positive case found. Horses confirmed as EP-positive have the following disposition options: lifetime quarantine, euthanasia, export from the country, or long-term quarantine with enrollment in the EP-treatment program. Horses enrolled in the treatment program must be confirmed as permanently cleared of the EP pathogen and test EP-negative on all available diagnostic tests to be released from quarantine.

Summary of 2024 Testing and EP-Positive Cases

- There were 20,105 domestic U.S. horses tested for EP from January to December 2024 and a total of 12 new EP-infected horses were identified in 7 states. Five (5) of these horses were Quarter Horse (QH) racehorses with iatrogenic transmission involved in the epidemiology of the infection, 5 equids were suspected or confirmed to have been illegally moved from Mexico, and 2 yearling colts were born to EP-positive mares and likely acquired infection via in utero transmission. Three (3) of the 12 EP-positive horses were found to be dual infected with EIA which was likely transmitted by iatrogenic infection in the 2 QH racehorse cases and by natural infection in Mexico for the other dual infected horse which was illegally moved from Mexico.

2024 EP Cases by State: 12 EP-infected horses found in 7 states (Jan-Dec 2024)

State Found	# EP-positive (<i>T. equi</i> unless noted)	# Dual infected with EIA	Risk Group
Arizona	2	0	Pony and mule illegally moved from Mexico
Georgia	1	0	QH racehorse
Indiana	2	0	Mare illegally moved from Mexico and her yearling colt
Nebraska	1		QH racehorse
North Carolina	1	1	Former QH racehorse
Texas	4	1	2 QH racehorses, 1 horse illegally moved from Mexico, 1 yearling colt born to EP- positive mare
Wyoming	1	1	QH roping gelding illegally moved from Mexico
Total	12	3	5 QH racehorses; 5 equids illegally moved from Mexico; 2 yearling colts with mare-to- foal transmission

- For questions regarding this report, please contact:

Angela Pelzel-McCluskey, DVM, MS
Equine Epidemiologist
USDA-APHIS-Veterinary Services
(970) 494-7391
Angela.M.Pelzel-McCluskey@usda.gov