



**Dr. Amy
Ordakowski-Burk**
301-405-8337
amyburk@umd.edu

Erin Petersen • 301-405-4690 • petersdr@umd.edu

JULY EXTENSION HAPPENINGS CALL THE EXTENSION OFFICE TO REGISTER

**Maryland State 4-H Horse Communications Contest, July 13,
Carroll County Agricultural Center**

Q I recently bought some hay that had buttercups in it. Aren't buttercups poisonous to horses?

A While buttercups (*Ranunculus* spp) are toxic to horses and cattle, they are usually avoided due to a bitter taste. Most horses would not ingest enough buttercups to cause any serious toxicity. **Fresh** leaves and stems of buttercups contain an oily glycoside called ranunculin. When the animal chews the plant, ranunculin is converted to protoanemonin by plant enzymes. Luckily for you, the **dried** plant that you found in your hay is non-toxic! Buttercups are commonly found in poorly managed pastures and hay fields throughout the state of Maryland. If your horses at pasture are found to be eating buttercups (which they shouldn't, if they have enough forage to eat), you will notice that they may salivate excessively, have inflamed mucous membranes, and mild diarrhea. These symptoms should disappear entirely once the animal is removed from the buttercups.

Supplemental Information on Equine Herpes Virus

In the May issue of *The Equiery*, I answered a question about the EHV-1 outbreak at the Columbia Horse Center (CHC). That article generated several additional questions about EHV-1. I would like to address them here to clear up any confusion.

• Your article recommending quarantine of horses returning to a farm from a show, etc., for three to four weeks does not seem to agree with statements made by the Maryland Department of Agriculture that horse owners should continue to participate in equine activities. Also, my vet recommended that I not attend any shows that CHC horses are also attending.

My recommendation is not specifically a result of the EHV outbreak at the CHC. It is estimated that approximately 50-60 percent of adult horses are latent carriers of EHV. This means that you won't know that they have the disease! Exposure to these horses under stressful conditions (a show, trailer ride, heat, etc.) increases the risk of spreading EHV to non-carriers. Most livestock farmers (poultry, cattle, etc.) already have policies of isolating new animals on their farms prior to introducing them to resident animals. This reduces their risk of an outbreak of disease that could seriously injure their animals and/or livelihood. I do realize that this is a difficult task for horse farms, because the nature of the horse is to be an athlete, which requires that it move about considerably more often than a cow or a chicken would. However, in order to *ensure* that you do not introduce a disease to your otherwise healthy herd of animals, you need to take precautions to isolate any animal that has been in contact

with non-resident horses. If possible, set up a portion of your farm (paddock, barn, etc.) that is not adjacent to resident horses to be used as a quarantine facility. A 21-day isolation period is ideal; however, a 10-day isolation period may be adequate, as the disease incubation period is anywhere from two to 10 days (that means that if your horse has been exposed to the virus, clinical signs of infection should appear within a week or so after exposure). If, after 10 days, the animal shows no clinical signs of illness, he can be returned to his normal housing. If all animals at the farm are in constant movement, then isolation is a moot point. However, if there is a resident herd of lesson or breeding horses that never leave the premises, these animals should be maintained separately from traveling animals. In response to the second statement, it serves no purpose to avoid any shows that CHC horses are attending. EVERY horse at CHC is under a strict quarantine – **no** horses can enter or leave the facility throughout the quarantine procedure. Once the 21-day period has ended with no new cases, the horses residing at CHC will not be any more or less likely to spread EHV than any other horse at a show.

• I read that horses stabled at Churchill Downs in Kentucky were allowed to ship to Pimlico even though there is an outbreak of EHV at Churchill. Could this lead to an epidemic in the state of Maryland?

The horses with EHV at Churchill Downs were not in the same barn as the Derby horses that came to Pimlico. The barns affected at Churchill were barns 6, 38 and 39 -- all of which were immediately quarantined for 21 days. I could not find any reference as to which barns housed the horses that came for the Preakness. However, one of the Derby runners (Don't Get Mad) WAS in one of the affected barns and, according to the quarantine, was not allowed to leave for Pimlico.

According to an article in *The Blood-Horse*, "Officials with the Kentucky Department of Agriculture have developed a plan for a return to limited training for the horses housed in the barns. Any of the horses in the barns not displaying clinical symptoms of EHV during the past seven days will be given a blood test. If the results of those blood tests for all horses in the barn are 'negative' for the presence of the virus, then the horses in that barn will be allowed to return to limited training. They will remain under quarantine and not be allowed to mingle with the general horse population at Churchill, but officials at the track will set aside a special time for them to train, most likely in the early evening hours ..." (<http://www.bloodhorse.com/articleindex/article.asp?id=28234>).

Security guards sit outside each barn to make sure no horses come or go, and that only the caretakers enter. Horses that ship in and out of Churchill Downs are required to present a 24-hour health certificate signed by a veterinarian before being allowed to do so. Bio-security measures are in place at each of the quarantined barns. The disease is not long-lived once in the air, so quarantining the affected horses and restricting their training times should be effective.

At the time of this writing (June 8), the only state to place restrictions on horses coming from Churchill Downs is the New York Racing Association (NYRA), which stated that horses coming from the quarantined barns at Churchill would be barred from NYRA tracks until further notice.

*Erin Petersen, MS, PAS
Extension Horse Specialist
petersdr@umd.edu*