

Vaccination - There is currently no vaccine for *C. pseudotuberculosis* in horses. There are research projects underway to develop one and it is hoped that there will be one in the near future. This disease is caused by a different strain of *C. pseudotuberculosis* than the one found in sheep and goats.

Remember - Prevention and proper treatment is key.

- Implement a good fly control program.
- Practice good biosecurity.
- Keep affected horses isolated.
- Use good hygiene when handling affected horses to avoid transferring the disease to unaffected ones. Disinfect hands and equipment used on the sick animals.
- Properly dispose of abscess fluids to avoid contaminating the soil.



Pigeon Fever in Arkansas - This fall and winter has brought a drastic increase in the number of *C. pseudotuberculosis* infections in equines in the state.



Thank you from the Micro “Staph”
at ALPC!



“Pigeon Fever” *Corynebacterium pseudotuberculosis* in Equines

A brief overview of epidemiology
and treatment options.



Tips to help recognize, diagnose, and treat
this emerging disease.

Arkansas Livestock and Poultry Commission
Veterinary Diagnostic Lab
1 Natural Resources Dr
Little Rock, AR 72205
501-907-2430
alpc.ar.gov

What is “Pigeon Fever”? - This disease, which is caused by the bacteria *Corynebacterium pseudotuberculosis*, causes large abscess to form usually on the pectoral muscles. It can, however, manifest on other areas of the body. It is called Pigeon Fever because of the large swelling on the chest that is reminiscent of a pigeon’s breast. Pigeon fever is typically contracted through skin abrasions or contact with contaminated soil. Insect vectors (such as horn or stable flies) are also common means of passing infection. This disease often manifests after a long dry spell that is followed by wet weather.



Diagnosis - Clinical signs of the infection include external abscesses, particularly in the pectoral area, around the head, and in the udder or sheath areas. Affected horses may also show signs of lethargy, anorexia, fever, lymphangitis and general malaise. The diagnosis can be confirmed through aerobic culture of the abscess contents. In cases of internal abscess, ultrasound can be used to detect the location. However, the

prognosis for horses affected by internal abscesses is poor, mainly because the disease has persisted for a long time before there is recognition that the horse is sick.



Treatment - Treatment is relatively easy: Lance and drain the abscess, and practice good hygiene to avoid further infection. Veterinarians and owners should pay special attention to the disposal of the waste material to limit the risk of infecting other horses on a property (the bacterium is very hardy and can survive in soil). Affected animals should be isolated to limit contact with other horses on the premises.



Complications can occur in horses with *C. pseudotuberculosis* infections about 10% of the time; common complications veterinarians

encounter include internal abscesses, ulcerative lymphangitis, weight loss, poor appetite, fever, and ill thrift. These can be very difficult to treat.

Antimicrobial therapy - Use of antimicrobials is usually discouraged in cases of pigeon fever. It is recommended that horses affected by external or pectoral abscesses *not* be given antibiotics. If a horse is placed on antibiotics prematurely, in most cases the infection will become dormant and resurface when antibiotics are discontinued. If there are extenuating circumstances such as internal abscesses or ulcerative lymphangitis, certain antimicrobials have been proven effective. Penicillin or TMS are the commonly used drugs for the treatment of Pigeon Fever.

Prevention - A good fly-control program should be implemented to help reduce the chance of the spread of the pathogen. Fly sheets, topical fly repellent, feed through fly control can all help protect your horse from disease carrying pests.

