



# Equine Piroplasmosis

## What is Equine Piroplasmosis?

Equine Piroplasmosis (EP) is a blood-borne protozoal disease that affects horses, donkeys, mules, and zebras. EP is currently not considered endemic in Texas or the U.S.; however, isolated outbreaks of the disease have occurred in recent years. *EP is not transmissible to humans.*

## Signs and Symptoms

Once infected, an equine can take 7 to 22 days to show signs of illness. Cases of EP can be mild or acute, depending on the virulence of the protozoa. Acutely affected equine can have fever, anemia, jaundiced mucous membranes, swollen abdomens, and labored breathing. Equine piroplasmosis can also cause equine to have roughened hair coats, constipation, and colic. In its milder form, EP causes equine to appear weak and/or possess a lack of appetite.

## Transmission

EP is a disease caused by the protozoa *Babesia caballi* or *Theileria equi* formerly *Bebesia equi*. The disease can be transmitted between horses or other equines by certain species of ticks, when they ingest blood from an infected animal and then bite an uninfected animal. It can also be spread through the transfer of blood during a transfusion, or through the use of contaminated needles and other unsanitary animal husbandry practices. Moving hay, bedding, feed, and vegetation can transport ticks carrying the protozoa. Intrauterine infection from mother to foal has been reported.

Several species of ticks in the U.S. are capable of spreading EP. The spread of EP through ticks however has only been seen in isolated areas in South Texas. Most cases of EP in other regions of Texas have been caused by either contaminated needles or instruments such as tattoo pliers and dental floats.

**Seek guidance from your private veterinarian before giving your horse any injectable treatments. ALWAYS use a fresh, sterile needle for every injection on your horses and practice good tick control with an approved product.**

## Border Issues

EP is found in many regions of the world, including parts of Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Europe, Central and South America, the Caribbean and Mexico. International movements of equine from foreign countries present potential risks for the introduction of EP into the U.S. The long border Texas shares with Mexico makes the Texas horse industry particularly vulnerable to the accidental introduction of EP.

## The History of Equine Piroplasmosis

An outbreak of EP was discovered in south Texas in 2009. Since that time, the TAHC has worked closely with equine industry groups, the Texas Racing Commission and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide an effective campaign to identify infected horses, stop the spread of the disease, and eliminate infection from within the state. In recent years, movement testing has led to the discovery of additional EP cases in Texas and a number of other states. Racing Quarter Horses and horses imported into the U.S. prior to 2006 have been determined to be at higher risk for EP. In response, the U.S. entry test requirements were enhanced and a requirement for negative EP test to enter Texas racetracks was implemented by the TAHC in 2011. Some South Texas ranch horses have also been found to be affected. As a result, testing was conducted in certain counties in 2012 and 2013 to determine the disease status of horses in the affected areas.



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## Texas EP Testing Requirements

Testing for EP may only be done by a laboratory approved by the TAHC. The Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Lab is currently approved to perform EP testing for movement of Texas horses into tracks or movement into other states that require the test prior to entry. Samples must be collected by an accredited veterinarian or a veterinary technician under direct supervision.

### Official Test Chart

A completed EP Laboratory Test Chart ([TAHC Form 10-07](#)) must be submitted with the blood sample, which should include all official identification on the horse. Either a manual illustration of distinctive markings or digital photos clearly showing the animals full face, right, and left side must also be used with the chart.

In the absence of any distinctive marking, colors or visible permanent identification (brands, tattoos, or scars), the animal must be identified with an "X" on the illustration provided on the chart indicating the location of any hair whorls, vortices or cowlicks.



### Management of Infected Equine

EP infected horses should be removed from contact with other horses and then kept in permanent quarantine

under TAHC specified conditions. Quarantined horses must be microchipped with an ISO 11784/11785 compliant microchip and another acceptable form of identification such as a unique tattoo. Tick control management techniques are also required for the stall or pasture where an infected horse resides.

### Treatment of Infected Equine

Working with their private veterinarian, a horse owner may also choose to have their horse treated for EP at their own expense. After the treatment period, follow-up tests must be conducted which may satisfy conditions for a quarantine release. Although, there are no guarantees. Field studies have demonstrated success in clearing some horses affected with EP. The Agreement for Treatment and other information may be obtained by contacting your TAHC Region office, TAHC Austin office or TAHC website at <http://www.tahc.texas.gov/agency/contact.html>.

### Texas Racetrack Requirements

By TAHC rule, equine entering a Texas racetrack facility must have a negative EP (T. equi only) test within the past 12 months.

### Horses Imported into Texas from Foreign Countries

A test for EP (as well as Equine Infectious Anemia, Glanders and Dourine) is routinely conducted by USDA veterinarians at the port of entry prior to final entry into the U.S. A test is not required on horses entering Texas from other states. Horse owners should check in advance for the entry requirements of the state of destination if they are planning to move a Texas horse to another state.

For more information on Equine Piroplasmiasis, contact the TAHC headquarters at 1-800-8242, your regional TAHC office, or visit the TAHC website at [www.tahc.texas.gov](http://www.tahc.texas.gov).

Information provided by the  
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