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GLANDERS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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Prepared by: Simon Hall
Andrew Paterson

Approved by: Nigel Gibbens

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Update

Wednesday 27 October 2004

It has been found that a number of legal consignments of horses from the United Arab Emirates have not been identified by the EU TRACES system; but were identified following the heightened alert on the TRACES Risk Messaging System (TRMS). The State Veterinary Service is tracing recent imports, which will subsequently be subjected to post-import blood sampling for glanders, in addition to documentary, identity and physical checks.

Based on historical trade patterns, the UK can expect low numbers of horses (less than ten per month) from the region, between now and the end of the year; rising to twenty horses per month between January and March. However, the number of horses imported is likely to rise significantly to between three hundred and four hundred per month in April and May 2005. The majority of imports of equidae from the region are high value bloodstock originating from the UAE.

Imports of horses from the UAE itself, are all high value, racing and breeding animals; managed entirely separately from indigenous equidae in the region. Considering this and the fact that the incident of disease was discovered and isolated in a quarantine premises, it is highly unlikely that any such high value bloodstock will have been exposed.

There is concern regarding the possibility of undisclosed disease in the region, however, imports from all countries in the region are being identified and subjected to heightened levels of checking and testing.

As a result of the above safeguard measures, this finding has not altered the level of risk to UK animal health, which the Veterinary Directorate considers to remain as negligible. The Directorate will continue to monitor and re-assess the situation.

Summary

The disease was detected on 10 April 2004 in 3 out of 10 horses that were imported into the UAE on 08 April 2004, by road from another Middle-Eastern country. Prior to detection of the disease, the horses had been placed under routine restriction while undergoing post-import checks.

The estimated date of primary infection is unknown (the initial cases were seen in imported animals whose previous history is not known to the Animal Wealth Department, Dubai).

A second incident of the disease was subsequently detected on 29 June 2004, in local horses sharing the same post-import premises.

The UAE authorities confirmed the disease to OIE on 25 September 2004 and the outbreak was reported by OIE on 15 October 2004. The delay between the date of the report and the date the information was received at the OIE Headquarters was due to an error in electronic communication.

The disease has been contained within the post-import isolation premises and has not entered the United Arab Emirates equine population.

All other recent imports to UAE from the same country have been traced and checked, and no disease has been found.

No horses have left the affected premises since the entry of the imported horses and routine post-import restrictions remain in place.

The Veterinary Directorate considers that the risk of this outbreak to UK animal health via legal trade is negligible. There is no evidence to show that glanders is present in any of the countries in the region authorised to export horses to the EU;. However, the Veterinary Directorate will continue to monitor and re-assess the situation.

1. GLANDERS – UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE)

1.1 Disease Report

Glanders has never been reported before in the UAE. On 25 September 2004, the Dubai authorities notified¹ the OIE of an incident of glanders in Al Ain, in the Emirate of Dubai, United Arab Emirates (Map 1).

Map 1: Location of Glanders outbreak in UAE



¹ OIE Disease Information, 15 October 2004, Vol. 17 - No. 42

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A second incident of the disease was subsequently detected on 29 June 2004, in local horses sharing the same postimport premises.

The performance of the tests currently available for glanders (including the complement fixation (CFT) and Mallein tests prescribed by OIE for international trade purposes), while being the best available, are less than satisfactory. As a consequence, the difficulty in accurately confirming the cause of the initial cases has contributed to the delay in reporting of this incident.

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2. LEGAL TRADE – CURRENT SITUATION

2.1 Live horses

UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Israel, Oman, Syria, Kuwait, Jordan, and Lebanon are on the EU approved third country list in 2004/211/EC, and are thus in principle authorised to import various classes of live equidae. Imports of equidae have been received from the following countries only:

Country	2001	2002	2003	2004	Date of last import to UK
United Arab Emirates	166	97	123	343	27/10/2004
Bahrain			1		-
Qatar	2	3	2	8	23/06/2004
Saudi Arabia	1	3	1	2	13/09/2004 (via Belgium)
Turkey		3	3	1	14/09/2004

Of the remaining countries in the region, Yemen, Iraq, and Iran are not approved for export of horses to the EU.

3. GLANDERS DISEASE RESTRICTIONS IN PLACE

3.1 The situation in UAE

The disease has been contained within the post-import isolation premises and does not appear to have entered the wider United Arab Emirates equine population.

Control measures applied by the competent authority in the UAE include trace back / forward of horses entering and leaving the infected premises. The remaining horses in the affected post-import isolation premises will be subjected to further testing (all have now undergone two complement fixation tests, with negative results, since the last cases were removed). All other recent imports from the same country have been traced and checked and no disease has been found. Further expert advice is being sought concerning the testing and release of the remaining horses, e.g. the possible use of the Mallein test.

No horses have left the affected premises since the entry of the imported horses and routine post-import restrictions remain in place.

4. EU RULES FOR IMPORTATION OF HORSES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST

UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Israel, Oman, Syria, Kuwait, Jordan, and Lebanon are authorised to export horses to the EU, provided that they are accompanied by the correct veterinary health certificate ('Group E').

For permanent imports this requires

- Glanders to be compulsorily notifiable in the country of origin.
- The horse to show no clinical signs of disease.
- The horse to have been resident in the country of origin for 3 months (or since birth if the animal is less than 3 months old, or since entry if imported directly from the EU during the previous three months).
- That glanders has not occurred in the country in the preceding six months.
- A test for glanders (complement fixation test) within 21 days of export, with negative result.

There are also attestations concerning other diseases.

For temporary admissions to the EU (e.g. to attend a competition or race), the residence requirements are less stringent, but the other conditions are essentially the same.

Countries or regions are authorised to export horses to the EU on the basis that glanders is believed to be absent. Nevertheless, EU import rules protect us against the possibility that a horse imported from the Middle East could have been exposed to infection.

4. ASSESSMENT OF THE RISK TO THE UK

On the basis of current information on the outbreak of glanders in the UAE, the Veterinary Directorate presently considers that with regard to legal trade in live horses the risk to the UK is negligible.

Other possible routes of infection, for example illegal imports of horses and imports of horsemeat are highly unlikely to be applicable in this case.

The infectious agent can be transported on contaminated tack, stable equipment and feed, but the likelihood of this arriving in the UK in the absence of a legal trade in horses is considered to be negligible.

On their own, none of the currently available tests are entirely satisfactory for the purpose of screening imported horses for glanders, however, when these tests are combined with a multiple levels of risk mitigation including:

- The disease is believed to be absent from those countries in the region approved for export of equidae to the EU,
- the new TRACES Risk Messaging alerts, highlighting all imports of equidae from the region,
- heightened checking of all relevant imports from the region.

The Veterinary Directorate considers that this outbreak poses a negligible risk to UK animal health, but as a precaution, the UK TRACES Risk Messaging System has now been updated with a requirement ensuring that any consignment of equidae originating from UAE or the region is highlighted, enabling them to be risk assessed and subjected to post-import checks.

5. CONCLUSION

The Veterinary Directorate considers that this outbreak poses a negligible risk to UK animal health. The initial information indicates that the outbreak is confined to a single post-import premises. The disease has been contained within the post-import isolation premises and has not entered the general equine population of the United Arab Emirates.

The Veterinary Directorate continues to monitor the situation and will re-assess the risks when new information becomes available.

Nigel Gibbens
Head, International Animal Health Division (28/10/2004)