

Vesicular Stomatitis Looms Again

Several horses in Arizona and New Mexico were diagnosed with Vesicular Stomatitis (VSV), a contagious disease of livestock, in June. By the time this article is read, the VSV threat to Colorado dairies may have escalated or disappeared. However, historically, the outbreak spreads northward into Colorado, particularly along river ways and in valleys.

Memories of the VSV 1995 outbreak should be fresh in our minds. That summer, following an unusually wet spring, 367 premises in New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, Utah, Wyoming, and Texas were positive for VSV. The majority of these positive cases were horses, but there were considerable inconveniences for the dairy industry: travel restriction, vaccination cost, and loss of cattle sales. To the Colorado state dairy industry's credit, there were no positive dairy cows in the state during this outbreak. The significance of VSV is two-fold. First the economic loss for a dairy infected with VSV can be devastating. Reduced milk production and increased cull rate are the primary cause of loss but increased cow and calf mortality, labor, feed and veterinary costs are also significant. Secondly and of more broad reaching importance, the clinical signs of VSV mimic those of foot and mouth disease that is a devastating disease of cloven hoofed animals that was eradicated from the US in 1929. The only way to differentiate the diseases is through expensive laboratory tests.

Results from careful study of the 1995 outbreak have influenced the VSV Risk Reduction Strategy and the Quarantine Regulations developed by the Colorado State Veterinarian. In the 1995 outbreak animals managed with little or no fly control, stressed, or in poor condition were more likely to show clinical signs of VSV.

The main tactics suggested to reduce the risk of contracting VSV are 1) to avoid direct contact with known affected animals, 2) to instigate an aggressive insect control program and 3) to keep your animals in good health. These suggestions follow simple good animal husbandry. In 1995 many healthy animals without evidence of fly or insect strike were exposed to VSV. Although these animals developed an immune response to the virus exposure, they did not develop clinical vesicular signs. Currently, there is no vaccine available. Grand Laboratories who furnished the vaccine in the 1995 outbreak may consider making vaccine if the outbreak escalates sufficiently.

The quarantine regulations continue to restrict movement of any animals on a premise where there is a positive animal. The quarantine is lifted 30 days after the lesions on the last affected animal have healed. However, the concept of quaranting premises within a concentric 10 mile circle has been eliminated. There was insufficient evidence that the disease spread into premises adjacent to infected premises to warrant these quarantines. The spread is more sporadic, characteristic of insect transmission. Thus, this year greater emphasis is being placed on insect control.

An informative fact sheet entitled Information about Vesicular Stomatitis for the Dairy Producer, August 1996, is available from Veterinary Services, USDA, APHIS. Telephone number and check the web site:<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/vetnet>

Further questions about this outbreak may be addressed to the State Veterinary Office 303-239-4161, or the area veterinarian in Charge 303-784-6229.

Thanks to Dr Wayne Cunningham for assistance in preparation of this article.