

Global Warming

To my mind there is no conclusive proof that global warming exists as we have had historical dramatic climatic events before man was producing pollution. However I do believe in conservation and sensible use of our finite world resources whether that be fossil fuels or rain forests. If global warming occurs it will be slowly progressive and floods, droughts and severe weather will cause as many problems for horse owners as increase disease risks.

The risk of the UK population and our horses and pets suffering new disease threats is however increasing. This is in part to our desire to travel with our animal companions. They in turn can occasionally pick up an exotic disease abroad and suffer clinical signs upon their return to the UK. Lorries and trains can bring insect populations many hundreds of miles in a short time and midges can travel many miles simply being blown by winds. Bluetongue virus has travelled northwards over the last few years and is now present in Southern England (2007). This virus does not infect Horses but a virus of the same family does! (African Horse Sickness) Equine Infectious Anaemia caused temporary problems in Ireland in 2006 and West Nile Virus has spread rapidly across the USA.

All of these dangerous diseases have a common thread – They are all transmitted by Insect Vectors. Put bluntly – if the country were cooler we wouldn't have any great worries as it would be too cold for the insect vectors to survive in large enough numbers to keep the disease circulating.

Clinical signs

Equine Infectious Anaemia

Spread by infected horse flies or mosquitoes. Occasionally by infected blood being transferred between horses (Eire 2006).

Horses suffer repeated disease incidents with progressive loss of condition, anaemia, muscle weakness, severe depression, fever, anorexia, ataxia, jaundice and swelling of the head, trunk and limbs which may kill them at a future date. *Fortunately the risk of it arriving in the UK is small.*

African Horse Sickness

Spread by infected midges and occasionally ticks and mosquitoes.

Associated with Respiration and circulatory impairment. Mortality is 70-95% in horses but around 10% in Donkeys and Zebras + Elephants can be asymptomatic but act as a reservoir of disease. Spain suffered outbreaks in the early 90's after importing infected Zebras. Incubation period is 7-14 days but can be as short as 2. Signs of a high fever with severe respiratory component indicate the Pulmonary form whilst swellings of the face, neck and chest along with heart failure are another syndrome. Commonly there is a mixture of both. There is a vaccine but it is not yet licensed or available in Europe and there are 9 strains which do not fully cross protect. On a positive note this disease is only circulating in Africa and occasionally Southern Europe. IT'S A LONG WAY FROM US THANKFULLY!

West Nile Virus

Causes disease in Horses, Humans, Dogs, Cats, Bats, Squirrels and domestic Rabbits. Spread by Mosquitoes that have fed upon infected birds. Signs of loss of appetite,

depression, fever, weakness of hind limbs / incoordination or paralysis. Mortality rates of 10 – 60%. A vaccine is available in the USA and has proven to be highly effective at disease prevention. *Occasional infected wild birds are found in the UK but the risk is still small.* **2009 – A Fort Dodge Vaccine is now available.**

Eastern, Western and Japanese Equine Encephalomyelitis.

Wild birds act as a reservoir of infection with mosquitoes, mites, ticks and lice acting as insect vectors.

Affects Horses, Humans, Birds and a variety of other mammals. Signs of Fever, sensitivity to sound, drowsiness and incoordination with paralysis in severe cases.

Minimal risk.

All in all we have to be aware of these diseases but as yet they have not arrived in the UK so don't panic and enjoy the sunshine if and when it arrives.