



agriculture, forestry & fisheries

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MEDIA STATEMENT

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AFRICAN HORSE SICKNESS OUTBREAK IN THE NORTHERN PARTS OF SOUTH AFRICA

In most of South Africa, except for a part of the Western Cape Province, African Horse Sickness (AHS) is endemic and the area is known as an AHS infected zone. Unfortunately, outbreaks of AHS are expected to occur in the AHS infected zone from November to May, often with a peak from February to April - depending on climatic factors such as rainfall and temperature. Certain parts of the Western Cape Province have been legislated as AHS controlled areas in terms of the Animal Diseases Act 1984 (Act no. 35 of 84) and these areas are generally free from AHS.

Outbreaks of AHS in Gauteng and Mpumalanga were officially reported to the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) in February and March 2019, however, there is currently no conclusive information indicative of unusually high incidences of AHS outbreaks for this time of the year. No outbreak has been reported from the AHS controlled area of the Western Cape Province.

Restrictions on equid movements within the AHS infected zone are not routinely implemented by state veterinary services, because this would be almost impossible to control and would be seen as unnecessarily restrictive by the majority of affected horse owners. The fact that the disease is transmitted by flying insects (midges) also makes restriction of horse movements less effective in the control of the disease.

DAFF is working with the equine industry on protective measures for horses in the AHS infected zone with the aim of reducing the severity of AHS outbreaks, while being neither too restrictive on the movement and trade of equids within the AHS infected zone, nor too onerous with regards to the administrative and financial burden of all role-players involved with equids.

You are advised to contact your local state veterinarians to ascertain whether local movement restrictions have been implemented for a particular area. Remember that it is vital to report cases of AHS to your local state veterinarian, so they are aware of these cases which enable them to make informed decisions.

The Animal Diseases Act 1984 (Act no. 35 of 84) requires that owners and managers of animals take all reasonable steps to protect their animals and prevent the spreading of diseases from their animals. The movement of equids that are infected with the AHS virus may increase the risk of AHS to other equids and should therefore be limited.

Some of the steps that you can take to protect your horses from AHS are listed below, but always consult your private veterinarian who will be able to assist you in tailoring strategies to help protect your horses from AHS:

- Report any case of AHS or suspected case of AHS to your local state veterinarian immediately;
- Prevent culicid midges that transmit the AHS virus from biting your horses by considering the following:
- Culicid midges gather and breed in moist or muddy areas; try to eliminate likely breeding areas by, for example, removing pools or puddles of standing water, siting muck heaps away from the equines and eliminating muddy areas such as around leaking taps and water troughs.
- Avoid allowing horses out of their stables until the dew on the grass is dry. Do not allow horses to graze on wet or marshy land if possible.
- Stable your horses from at least two hours before sunset to at least two hours after sunrise.
- Treat your horses and the stable facility with a culicoides midge repellent and/or insecticide registered in terms of the Fertilisers, Farm Feeds, Agricultural Remedies and Stock Remedies Act 1947 (Act no. 36 of 47). In addition, consider the use of day sheets to help protect horses from midges.
- Ensure your horses are vaccinated against AHS with a vaccine registered in terms of the Fertilisers, Farm Feeds, Agricultural Remedies and Stock Remedies Act 1947 (Act no. 36 of 47). Ensure that your animals are vaccinated by the correct person, in the correct time period and according to the AHS zone they are in. Now while there is increased activity of the vector, is not the right time to vaccinate. Always handle, store and administer vaccines carefully according to the manufacturer's instructions

and ensure that it is kept cold until it is given to the animal. Please see the DAFF website for more information on vaccination against AHS.

- According to Section 11 of the Animal Diseases Act 1984 (Act no. 35 of 84), if you have had a case of AHS on your property, you should inform your neighbours, anyone who brings equines to your property and anyone you take one of your horses to. This will help ensure they can take precautions to keep their animals safe too.

Please contact your local animal health technician or state veterinarian if you are unsure what AHS zone your animals are in, or if you require any guidance with regards to AHS control measures or reporting. Contact details for the provincial veterinary services and your local state veterinarian can be accessed by using the following link: <https://www.daff.gov.za/daffweb3/Branches/Agricultural-Production-Health-Food-Safety/Animal-Health/contacts/provincialveterinary>.

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