

Heading to a horse clinic or show, and on the list of required documentation, you notice that one of the required documents is proof of a negative Coggins test.

## What is a Coggins test and why is it needed?

A Coggins test is a blood test that looks for antibodies against the transmissible viral disease Equine Infectious Anemia. The test was developed over 45 years ago and is called the Coggins test after the developer, Dr. Leroy Coggins. Equine Infectious Anemia Virus (EIAV) is transmitted via anything that can carry infected blood from an infected horse to an unaffected horse, including from an infected mare to fetus. Clinical signs are variable, and often go unnoticed. The disease progresses through three phases: acute phase, recurrent phase, and chronic phase, where horses may not exhibit any signs of infection but can still be carriers (and transmitters) of the virus. Contracting EIA can also be fatal, and horses that are chronic EIA may experience flare ups during periods of stress or use of corticosteroids.

Horses that are infected with EIAV are infected for life. As a result, infected horses must be euthanized or separated for life from all other equids. Surveillance for this disease is very important for any equine healthcare program since there is no vaccine or cure for the disease. In some parts of the country EIA is frequently diagnosed in horse populations. EIA was diagnosed in horses in Montana as recently as 2017, reminding us of the need to remain vigilant when testing for EIA. A veterinarian is required to report positive test results to the state.

Because EIA is easily transmitted and there is no cure, it is important that horse owners, clinicians, and barn managers are diligent about testing horses on an annual basis, as well as requiring proof of negative tests for any equine event and change of ownership. Proof of a negative Coggins test is also required for travel. Owners should add this test to their annual vaccination regimen to ensure their horses are covered for any event. In Montana, a negative Coggins test is valid for 12 months (this duration of validity varies among states). By consistent testing of most horses, the horse community and veterinarians will be able to decrease the risk and spread of EIA.

An EIA information sheet is available online from MSU Equine Extension: <http://animalrangeextension.montana.edu/equine/disease.html>

