

# Equine Health Solutions

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## Piroplasmosis

With the quarantine and euthanasia of the horses in Raytown, MO, we have received a lot of questions about Piroplasmosis and the risk to our client's horses. Since apparently, two of the infected horses have been stolen, the question is "How much health risk are our client's horses exposed to?" First let me give you a little information about the disease itself and the health risk it has to your horse.

Piroplasmosis is a tick borne disease of the horse caused by one of two protozoa. The protozoa are named *Babesia caballi* (*B. Caballi*) or *Theileria equi* (*T. equi*). The protozoa attach to and can destroy the red blood cells of a horse. Natural transmission of the disease agents are by ticks, but man can spread the agents by unsound medical practices, for example reusing a contaminated needle in multiple horses. Usually it is a disease that is limited to the tropics or subtropics **not** the Midwest United States, due to the type of ticks that transmit the disease agents. *B. caballi* is transmitted from adult tick to the tick's offspring. *T. equi* can be transmitted from tick to tick between a couple of tick species, but these tick species only exists in regions where the temperature remains above 60 degree Fahrenheit. The infectious agent in these horses has not been made public information. If it is *T. equi* then our winter should limit the spread of the disease. If it is *B. caballi* then the two stolen horses have the potential of infecting the tick population in the region and putting the region's horse population in jeopardy.

Since the protozoa infects the red blood cells, the clinical signs of the disease include fever, depression, lack of appetite, weakness, tearing eyes, nasal discharge, yellowing of the mucous membranes, dark urine, and potentially death. The clinical signs can occur in the first 1 to 4 weeks after infection. Also, you will notice these clinical signs are general in their description and many diseases can have the same clinical signs. So in the next few months, unless your horse is kept in the same stable environment as the two stolen horses, your horse probably does not have Piroplasmosis. An infected horse can become a carrier of the disease, which means it is capable of spreading the disease but not show any clinical signs.

Current treatment does not always eliminate all of the protozoa from the horse. A new treatment is being developed but it appears to be expensive and takes around six months to complete.

If you have any further concerns or questions, please call us at 816.322.8040 and we would be happy to talk to you.