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**From Jim Paice MP**  
Minister of State for Agriculture and Food

A handwritten signature in cursive script, which appears to read "Jim Paice".

Thank you for your letter of 26 October, requesting further information about Equine Infectious Anaemia. This information is provided below.

**How many suspected or confirmed cases of EIA have there been in the UK in the last 12 months? In all of those cases, is Defra aware of the route by which infected equidae entered the UK?**

In 2009 there was only one report case into Equine Infectious Anaemia (EIA).

This year there have been eight investigations concerning EIA, most of which were post-import testing investigations. Three of these cases were confirmed (Wiltshire in January; Northumberland and Devon in September) and four were negative either on clinical grounds or after samples were taken. The Devon case remains outstanding pending the required second round of testing. The three confirmed cases were the first in mainland UK since 1976.

Of the three confirmed cases, two were from imports (Wiltshire and Northumberland) and the third (Devon) was detected by the owner's veterinary surgeon and reported. All had histories of importation from Europe, the case reported by the owners Vet had been imported from Europe two years before.

**Is there any evidence of EIA transmission within the UK? Under what conditions could EIA be transmitted in the UK?**

There is no evidence of any circulation of EIA virus in the UK. In the three confirmed cases this year, the infected horses were imported, and are believed to have been infected before importation.

EIA is mainly transmitted by simple mechanical transmission via inoculation by the piercing mouthparts of large biting flies. The virus is very fragile and relies on the fly's feeding being interrupted, and the fly then travelling to another susceptible equid while it still has viable virus on its mouthparts. These flies travel no more than 200m between feeds, carrying blood from an animal actively showing signs of the disease. It is unlikely that a horse showing no clinical signs would have a level of virus in their blood capable of spreading the disease via biting flies. The virus can also be transmitted by equipment contaminated with blood such as needles and syringes.

Transmission of the disease generally occurs where there are large numbers of these adult biting fly species in proximity to acutely affected horses and occurs most often during periods of high insect activity, in low-lying swampy areas close to woodlands. Under UK conditions, these adult flies are considered to be active between April and October, with activity peaking in July-August. The flies overwinter as larvae and the larvae cannot transmit the disease.

It is also possible for disease to be transmitted by equipment such as grooming, tack, dental, obstetric, farriery, tattooing, and veterinary instruments e.g. needles and scalpels.

**It is reported that the two horses in Wiltshire found to have tested positive for EIA antibodies were discovered through random post-import testing – what proportion of equidae imported to the UK are subject to testing? Does Defra specify a time period within which post-import testing should take place? Are all Equidae imported from countries where EIA is prevalent or endemic subject to post-import testing?**

The post-import testing that is carried out contains elements of both random and risk-based checks and testing. A proportion of all animal movements from other EU Member States to the UK are randomly checked for compliance with certification requirements – this is around 3%. In addition to this, consignments that are deemed at higher risk of non-compliance with certification requirements are checked using a risk-based approach. Any animal or consignment that is found to have any suspicion of non-compliance with certification requirements are tested for disease, whether picked up by the random or risk-based checks. It is difficult to give a total number as this will change constantly.

The UK has checked all equines which have entered the UK directly from Romania since 2007. These animals were all tested on arrival into the UK. In addition, the UK checks for horses moved to the UK which were found to have spent any time in Romania or Italy in the previous 12 months. These horses are found through passport compliance or welfare checks.

Extensive or blanket checks carried out by the Member State of destination would be illegal under EU-Trade rules and also unjustified as it would be disproportionate to the risk. The UK is a major beneficiary of the open market and these trade rules facilitate our thriving trade in the export of livestock and their products.

Because of the relatively low risk of EIA, the most proportionate way to prevent disease spread in the UK is through vigilance by owners and private vets. Clinical signs must be reported immediately to the Government's Animal Health Agency. Most UK horses are closely monitored by owners and their private vets so disease is very likely to be picked up

The UK Horserace Betting Levy Board Code of Practice, recommends that all breeding horses are tested for EIA once a year before the breeding season. It also advises against importing horses

from an affected country, but if so any horse should be isolated in vector-proof accommodation and blood tested 30 days after import.

**Does Defra impose any particular restrictions on horses being moved from Member States where EIA is prevalent or endemic?**

The animal health conditions governing the intra-EU trade and import from third countries of horses are harmonised through the whole of the EU by the implementation of Directive 90/426/EEC. There is limited scope for the UK Government to adopt unilateral measures in relation to EIA.

Following the January outbreak in Wiltshire, Defra worked with the EU Commission to create a new Decision severely restricting the movement of horses from Romania, and allowing Member States importing horses of Romanian origin to take responsibility for disease controls (it was previously the responsibility of the exporting country). It means:

- A ban on trade of equidae and equine products originating from Romania (including horses, donor mares, and ova and embryos) unless they: originate from a premise at least 200 metres away from other horses; are held for 90 days; and tested for EIA twice at a 90-day interval with a negative result, the last test being not more than 10 days before movement.
- Breeding or production horses from Romania also are restricted, isolated and tested at destination and then undergo a 90 day standstill and further negative test prior to onward movement, at the importer's expense. An EU Food and Veterinary Office mission was scheduled to check whether the new measures were being properly applied in Romania.
- For the rest of the EU, all equidae must come from premises either free of EIA or where EIA-infected horses have been slaughtered and any remaining horses on the place where infection was identified have twice tested negative three months apart.
- In addition, the UK has in place an increased surveillance where any horses that have spent any time in Romania and Italy in the past 12 months can be tested for EIA.

**It is reported that in at least one of the recent confirmed cases of EIA, the horse was imported from Romania. Council Decision 2007/269/EC on protective measures with regard to EIA requires equidae, or ova and embryos of equidae originating from Romania to be subject to a Coggin's test prior to export. Has Defra determined whether that Directive was complied with in these cases?**

All cases of EIA detected in the UK subsequent to the Wiltshire case, relate to horses that left Romania before the Council Decision was approved and enforced, or came to the UK after a period of time spent in other Member States. In these cases, the horses moved from Romania to another EU Member State prior to moving to the UK. We are working with other Member States to gather more information on these cases and how they came to be consigned.

All horses which are certified using the EU Trade notification system (TRACES) as having spent any period of residence in either Romania or Italy are tested as routine when they enter the UK. We have increased post-import surveillance on consignments of more than four horses from the Continent.

**Has Defra paid compensation in respect of the confirmed cases of EIA? Does Defra anticipate any changes to the current arrangements for compensation with respect to EIA?**

The owners of the horses for the cases in Northumberland and Devon have been sent compensation payment by postal order; payment to the owner of the Wiltshire case in January is currently being processed.

We have no immediate plans to change the current compensation arrangements, but we will need to consider the advice from the Responsibility and Cost Sharing Advisory Group when their report is published later this year.

**What measures are in place to track the movement of imported equidae once they enter the UK? Does Defra track the movement of equidae imported from EIA endemic countries?**

Imports of horses from Third countries to the UK must be officially certified and come from EU approved Third Countries. All these consignments must be registered on the EU Trade notification system (TRACES) and can therefore be traced if necessary.

In the case of movements of horses from other Member States, all non-registered horses must be certified using the TRACES system. Registered horses may also use the TRACES system but can also move accompanied with a health attestation. This does not apply to movements from France and Republic of Ireland where the Tripartite Agreement applies.

There are no measures in place in the UK to track imported equidae once they enter the UK and have gone through any necessary post import checks. However, the UK checks horses that have moved to the UK which have spent any time in Romania or Italy in the previous 12 months. These horses are found, for example, through passport compliance or welfare checks.

**What impact has the incidence of EIA in the UK had on the movement of equidae from the UK to the EU, and to countries outside of the EU?**

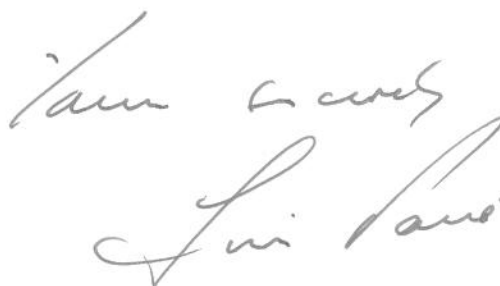
None. EIA is controlled through premises level restriction. No trade sanctions were imposed. Third Country trade has not been affected as they mostly require testing and premises freedom. There were no restrictions to intra-EU trade as this requires only premises freedom without testing.

**What advice has Defra given to horse owners concerned about EIA?**

Defra has published on its website specific EIA guidance for horse owners. The guidance includes advice on what to do if a suspected infected animal is found, how to protect your horse and how to minimise the risk to horses.

(<http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/farmanimal/diseases/atoz/eia/keepers/index.htm>).

Defra is committed to improving communications with horse owners and keepers. We are working with the British Equine Veterinary Association to ensure that equine veterinarians are aware how to identify and report notifiable disease to Animal Health. We are also working with industry representatives to improve communications with horse owners and keepers during disease outbreaks.

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**JIM PAICE MP**