

Entire horse industry affected

VEE serious threat, prof says

A veterinarian who worked on the development of a vaccine for Venezuelan Equine Encephalomyelitis (VEE) in 1945 believes the disease is a serious threat to the nation's \$12 billion horse industry. Dr. Fred D. Maurer, associate dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine, said VEE may be fatal if the infection reaches the brain and spinal cord. He reported VEE was first

identified as a separate disease in Venezuela in the 1930s and its history has been tragic in South and Central America.

The fatal strain struck the United States July 1 at Brownsville. In the past two weeks, Maurer said, an estimated 100 horses have died, another 500 are sick and 34 human cases have been suspected.

Texas' \$1 billion horse industry was placed under a statewide quarantine July 13 and a voluntary statewide vaccination program was authorized.

Roughly 200,000 of the state's half-million horse population has received the vaccine.

Maurer said the vaccine is being used as quickly as it becomes available to distribution centers throughout the state. An additional 200,000-dose shipment will reach the state July 21.

The only VEE vaccine available is an experimental one developed by the U. S. Army at

Fort Detrick, Md., and produced under contract by National Drug Laboratories.

It is a weakened live virus vaccine attenuated by serial dosage in tissue cultures. The present lot of vaccine is from the 83rd tissue culture passage, so it is designated "TC83."

Four Texas A&M faculty members have had extensive experience with VEE while doing research at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and at Fort Detrick.

Drs. Maurer and Kenneth Kuttler were involved with the development and production of an earlier killed virus vaccine from chick embryos. Dr. Chester Gleiser was involved with a study of the pathology of VEE in a variety of animal species and Dr. Stewart McConnell with the development of the TC83 vaccine currently in use.

In addition, the Institute of Tropical Veterinary Medicine at

Texas A&M, which Maurer heads and the others are associated with, has had a team of researchers in Colombia where they have kept in contact with the progress of the disease since 1967.

McConnell has also been involved in the testing of TC83 vaccine in South America in 1967-68 and 1970.

Maurer said the disease normally cycles in rodents and mosquitoes, spreading to horses when there is a susceptible population. Man becomes a victim as a result of the high concentration of virus in horses, he explained.

Once VEE moves into a non-immune horse population in an area with many mosquitoes, it will tend to spread rapidly until all the horses are recovered, immune or dead.

Maurer said without susceptible horses, the disease will die down and go back to cycling in rodents awaiting a new generation of susceptible horses. Or,

until mosquitoes are carried or blown by a storm to a susceptible horse population.

A tropical storm in 1944 blew infected mosquitoes off shore to the island of Trinidad, where the first human deaths from VEE were identified.

In 1962-63, there was an outbreak in Venezuela and Colombia killing thousands of horses.

VEE has been active in Colombia and Venezuela since 1968, Maurer said, and the present outbreak came from Ecuador and Peru in 1969.

It spread to Central America and Mexico, with more than 6,000 cases occurring in Southern Mexico in 1970.

June 19 of this year clinical cases were observed 35 miles south of Brownsville. Vaccine was released June 25 on the U. S. side of the border and by July 9 a 13-county quarantine was established on a line south of Corpus Christi to Laredo.

The U. S. Department of Agriculture, working with the Texas Animal Health Commission, is responsible for the vaccine distribution and quarantine regulation, Maurer stressed.

Last Sunday a five-state mandatory vaccination program was announced by the USDA.

Maurer said horses develop clinical signs of the disease within three to eight days after infection. In non-fatal cases, the horse's temperature will return to normal in two to four days, but convalescence is slow.

Approximately 50 per cent of infected horses will have central nervous system involvement, and such animals become abnormal in their disposition, posture and behavior, he said.

If the disease is fatal, death usually will occur within three to four days after the first clinical signs, Maurer explained.

Vet Medicine prof answers questions

State-wide distribution of a protective vaccine against the spreading Venezuelan Equine Encephalomyelitis (VEE) was announced last Wednesday by Dr. Fred D. Maurer, dean of research at Texas A&M University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

Maurer said vaccine centers will be established throughout the state, beginning with the Lower Rio Grande Valley and Gulf Coast. Local veterinarians will be notified by the State Animal Health Commission and all vaccinations will be given by veterinarians, he reports.

Maurer is coordinating the program between Dr. H. Q. Sibley, executive director of the State Animal Health Commission, and the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Horse owners throughout the state are warned by Dr. Maurer to keep close watch on their stock and report any unusual health conditions to their veterinarian or public health officials.

The disease has spread from South America through Mexico into the Lower Rio Grande Valley. It is now on the Texas coast.

Maurer said horses have no natural immunity to the disease. He gave the following report on the most common questions about VEE:

Q. What can the horse owner do to protect his horses until the

vaccine becomes available in his areas?

A. Each horse owner should keep his horses at home, stop all horse movements and avoid contact with other horses. The owner should spray his horses and the premises with a mosquito repellent to protect his animals from mosquito bites. He should contact the local veterinarian and have his horses vaccinated as soon as the vaccine becomes available.

Q. Will the vaccine currently used in the United States to protect against Western Equine Encephalomyelitis (WEE) and Eastern Equine Encephalomyelitis (EEE) protect against VEE?

A. No. These three diseases are caused by immunologically different viruses. A separate vaccine must be used for each disease.

Q. Is the vaccine being made available throughout the state safe and effective against VEE?

A. Yes. The vaccine available in Texas will protect against this disease provided horses are vaccinated at least 10 days before exposure to the virus. This is an experimental attenuated virus vaccine developed by the U. S. Army for human use, but it has been used with excellent success in some two million horses of South and Central America. As soon as current tests are com-

pleted, it is expected the vaccine will no longer need to be classified as experimental.

Q. Since this is a live virus vaccine, do horses show any adverse reactions to it?

A. Reports on the reactions following the vaccination of some 14,000 horses in Southern Texas have shown less than two per cent mild reactions.

Q. How soon will horses be protected after vaccination?

A. Significant protection will have developed after seven to 10 days. Horses are known to be fully protected after 14 days.

Q. Is it safe to vaccinate pregnant mares?

A. The vaccination of pregnant mares is not without some risk to the foal. But we know that if the mare becomes infected with the natural disease, there is a 30 to 50 per cent chance that both she and her foal will be lost. So that both mare and foal in an infected area are relatively safer with the vaccine than without it.

Many pregnant mares have been vaccinated with no ill effects to the mare or foal.

Q. Is it safe to vaccinate foals?

A. Foals as young as three weeks of age have been vaccinated with no ill effects.

Q. When will the vaccine become available?

A. State and federal authorities have indicated the vaccine will be made available throughout the state as soon as possible starting with the southern counties which are at greatest risk.

Q. Is the vaccine available to horse owners or only to veterinarians?

A. The vaccine will only be available to accredited veterinarians for several reasons.

It is still an experimental vaccine which requires that it be administered by a veterinarian who can determine the condition of the horse before and after use.

The vaccine must be used properly after reconstitution and kept cold as well as administered in an aseptic manner with fresh sterile equipment for every horse. Officials records must be maintained by the veterinarian who also must get a release signed by the owner.

Q. How is VEE transmitted?
A. Transmission occurs primarily through the bite of infected mosquitoes.

Essentially all types of mosquitoes and some biting flies are capable of transmitting the disease. Although infrequent, transmission can also occur from contact with fluids from infected horses at the height of temperature when the concentration of virus is usually highest.

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'Disabled Vet' auto tags planned

AUSTIN—A new program will provide free 1972 automobile license plates to some disabled veterans, the Texas Highway Department said last week.

The program was set up by an act of the 62nd Legislature. To qualify, an applicant must:

- Be a Texas resident;
- Be a veteran of the armed

forces of the United States;

- Have a disability rating of 70 per cent or more;
- Be drawing compensation from the federal government as the result of service-connected disability.

A qualified veteran is entitled to register one passenger car or light commercial vehicle with a manufacturer's rated carrying capacity of one ton or less for his own use without paying the prescribed registration fee. There is a statutory fee of \$1 which must accompany each application.

Specially designed license plates will be issued with the letters "DV" appearing as either a prefix or suffix to the license number. The words "Disabled Vet" also will appear on the plates.

The license plates will not be available until the beginning of the 1972 registration year. The law provides that the disabled veteran must make application by Oct. 1 preceding the registration year for which the plates are requested.

All Disabled Vet plates will be issued directly from the Motor Vehicle Division of the Texas

Highway Department in Austin.

As a prerequisite, the veteran's disability rating must be verified by the Veteran's Administration or the branch of the armed forces from which he draws his disability compensation.

Also, the Texas title to the vehicle must be issued in the name of the veteran.

Application forms and instructions may be secured from the Texas Highway Department, Motor Vehicle Division, 40th and Jackson Avenue, Austin, Texas 78703.

The forms also will be available from Motor Vehicle Division district offices in Houston, San Antonio, Corpus Christi, Port Arthur, El Paso, Fort Worth, Dallas, Lubbock, Amarillo and Longview, as well as county tax offices; county veteran service officers; American Legion headquarters in Austin and Veterans of Foreign Wars headquarters in Austin.

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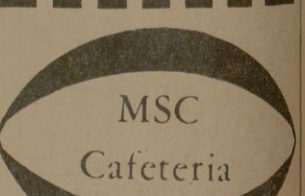
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