African Horse Sickness

**Author**: Dr Melvyn Quan

**Adapted from:** Coetzer, J.A.W and Guthrie, A.J. 2004. African horse sickness, in *Infectious diseases of livestock*, edited by J.A.W. Coetzer & R.C. Tustin. Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 2: 1231-1264

 Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution license](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/). 

# Important outbreaks

In Egypt the disease occurred in 1928, 1943, 1953, 1958 and 1971 (all outbreaks originated in the areas of Aswan and Qena Provinces, and the international boundaries between Egypt and Sudan), in Yemen in 1930 and in the then Palestine, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan in 1944.

During the summer of 1959, AHS caused by serotype 9 occurred in the south eastern regions of Iran. This was followed by outbreaks during the spring of 1960 in most of the Persian Gulf area (Cyprus, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan) as well as in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Turkey. Between 1959 and 1961 this region lost more than 300 000 equids.

In 1965 the disease occurred in Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco and also spread across the Strait of Gibraltar into Spain in 1966. Fortunately it occurred at the end of the summer and the outbreak in Spain was quickly terminated by application of strict control measures.

Between 1987 and 1990 outbreaks of AHS occurred again in Spain; the original source of infection was suspected to be ten zebras (*Equus burchelli*) imported from Namibia. AHS was also diagnosed in southern Portugal in 1989 and northern Morocco between 1989 and 1991; these outbreaks are thought to be extensions of outbreaks that occurred in August of the same year in southern Spain.

In 1989 a minor outbreak of AHS, caused by serotype 9, was reported in Saudi Arabia after an absence of 30 years. In 1997 outbreaks of AHS were reported in Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

AHS is endemic to southern Africa. An outbreak of 1855 is still considered to have been the largest in the region; nearly 70 000 horses, making up more than 40 per cent of the entire horse population of the Cape of Good Hope, died. In northern Africa, AHS is reported regularly in Ethiopia and Senegal and on occasion from Eritrea, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and The Gambia. It has been shown recently that a live-attenuated vaccine-derived serotype 9 strain of AHSV is circulating in The Gambia. Outbreaks of AHS have only been reported once in Côte d’Ivoire (1997) and on the Cape Verde islands (1999).