

The New Coggins Card

Say good-bye to flimsy, yellow, hard-to-read Coggins papers!

By Summer Best

Your horses' Coggins papers are one of the simplest, and yet can be one of the biggest, problems of horse keeping. They tear easily, the writing can smear and become illegible, and they are readily duplicated or illegally manipulated without much fuss.

In 2004, at least three versions of Coggins papers were being produced in Florida alone. The familiar "yellow" Coggins on carbon paper, the newer E-Coggins with digital photos of your horse, and also E-Coggins without digital photos.

Because proof of negative EIA test (Coggins papers) is mandatory for every horse in Florida (and some other states) traveling off its owner's property, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), Division of Animal Industry, realized it was time to advance the program. Brenda Bass, chief lab technician at a Coggins lab in Ocala, "sets up" several Coggins tests using horse blood serum.

The Handy Little Card

In the past year, the FDACS began developing a durable little card – similar in size and quality to a credit card – to update and eventually replace the antiquated Coggins papers. The new card, officially called the "Negative EIA Test Verification Card," is a must-have for your 2005 records.

On the front side of the trendy new cards, your horse's name, breed, sex, color and age are printed alongside three small color photos to verify his identity. Test date, lab accession number and lab name are also listed. The back of the card offers even more data, including the horse owner's name and contact information, the veterinarian's contact information, dates and more. The card contains exactly the same information as the paper version of your current Coggins.

"We feel that having photos on the cards will definitely improve the process of identifying horses," said Dr. John Irby, Florida Diagnostic Veterinary Manager for District 5. "On the paper documents, very few of the drawings are drawn in as exact as the actual horse's markings. The photos on the new cards are small, but they are adequate to identify the horse."

Dr. Irby ran a pilot project with the Coggins cards in 2004, and the

response was positive. Cathy and Byron Moore of Riverview, Florida, participated in the experiment.

“ I loved it,” says Cathy, who is an avid trail rider and parade participant. “I was showing mine off to everyone. I think people will be tickled with the new cards because of their convenience. They aren’t bulky and they are easy to carry.”

Cathy keeps hers in her purse, right alongside her driver’s license. Setting up a Coggins test

How to Get a Card

Beginning January 1, 2005, the new Coggins card was made available to all horse owners in Florida. Even better, cards will be issued free of charge until June 30, 2005.

To participate, your veterinarian should take three digital, color photos of your horse. She or he will then fill out an application requesting the laminated cards. Next, once your horse’s bloodwork is complete at a testing lab, your veterinarian will send test results and the digital photos to the card production facility, which is overseen by the FDACS.

A fast turnaround time is expected.

“From the time we receive the application, the test results and the horse’s photos, we anticipate a turnaround time of less than a week,” Dr. Irby said.

Within Florida, the cards will be fully accepted, and about a dozen neighboring states have plans for similar programs. If you acquire a Coggins card and your travel plans include long-distance road trips, call ahead to your state of destination to verify that they have heard of and will accept the new Coggins cards. Regulations change from time to time, and a quick phone call could save some confusion later.

“ Another good feature of the cards is that they can also become regular identification cards for your horse,” Dr. Irby added. “If your horse is stolen, you have a positive I.D. for him right there, complete with color photos.”

Horse Passport

The FDACS put forth advances in the Equine Event Extension form, as well.

For the past several years, horses hauled across state lines have been required to carry not only proof of negative EIA test (Coggins), but also veterinary-assigned health papers, which certify the horse in good health. Health papers are only valid for 30 days, so people who travel out of state

frequently with their horses have been encouraged to apply for an Equine Event Extension form, which is valid for six months.

January 1, 2005, the FDACS began offering this event extension form on a small laminated card, too – very much like the new Coggins card – and also complete with digital photos of your horse. The new card will be called the Equine Interstate Passport Card. It will be valid for six months, just as before.

“ The technology is available for more options,” Dr. Irby said. “We can later include a magnetic strip and other possibilities.”

Convenient & Safer

Horse owners see the new cards as items of convenience. State officials and equine event planners, however, are most interested and pleased with the cards’ reliability features, thanks to the digital photos.

As Dr. William Jeter, Bureau Chief for the FDACS Division of Animal Industry, explained, “The old Coggins paper is confusing, and doesn’t look official. Markings aren’t always drawn in correctly. These new cards should help eliminate some of those problems.”

Last year, Nancy Cloos, an endurance rider from Clermont, Florida, participated in a pilot program for testing the new cards.

“ Normally, I haul out of state every month,” Nancy says. “The new cards are great because you don’t have to have the flimsy papers.”

Merry and Alan Fuson of Cape Coral, Florida, also tested the cards.

“ informationWe love the cards,” Merry says. “People say, ‘Wow! Where did you get those? People are excited about them. We’re kind of new to horses, so we’re always worried that we’ve forgotten something when we take the horses somewhere,” Merry says. “So I made photocopies of the cards and I’ll even leave a set in the horse trailer, just in case we need them.”

The Bottom Line

- * New Coggins cards are voluntary.
- * Coggins cards are accepted throughout Florida and several Southeastern states. Because this is a new project, always call ahead if you are traveling out of state – just to be sure that your destination is aware of the cards and will accept them without confusion.
- * Your veterinarian must submit all paperwork for the cards to be

created.

- * Submissions must include application, proof of negative EIA test, and three color, digital photographs of your horse.

- * Applications and photos are sent to the card production facility, which is overseen by the FDACS, Division of Animal Industry.

- * Turnaround time for a new card, with all appropriate paperwork and photos, is a few business days.

- * To introduce the program, from January 1, 2005-June 31, 2005, horse owners can apply for the Coggins cards and Equine Passport cards free of charge

- * Beginning July 1, 2005, Coggins cards will cost \$5 (in addition to what your veterinarian charges you to run the original test). Equine Passport cards will cost \$15 per application, and \$5 for each addition card for additional horses on the same application.

- * Because this format was just released, your veterinarian may be unfamiliar with the new cards.

No Vaccine & No Cure

What is EIA and the Coggins Test?

Equine infectious anemia (EIA), commonly known as swamp fever, is a viral disease that attacks the horse's immune system. Caused by a retrovirus closely related to the Human Immune Virus (HIV) in humans, EIA has no cure, and it has a death rate of up to 30 percent in acutely infected animals. A surviving, infected horse remains a carrier of the disease, and therefore poses a degree of threat to other horses for the rest of its life. The disease is spread primarily by biting horse flies.

Currently no vaccine is available to prevent a horse from contracting the disease.

EIA dates back at least 160 years. The first recorded case of EIA appeared in France in 1843. Scientists who noted the symptoms thought perhaps it was a nutritional disease. If they tried to "cure" the horse by adjusting the feedings, they soon found out it didn't help the depression, fever, weakness and weight loss the horse was experiencing. By the time the disease was recorded again in 1861, scientists had begun to wonder if a nutritional problem was really the cause.

Two years after the second outbreak in France, EIA was documented in Switzerland. Two years after that, it appeared in Germany and spread through the German cavalry horses. Since then, nearly every European country has reported cases of EIA, as have Russia, several African countries and much of Asia. Japan had one of the first epidemics. During

the first decade of the 1900s, more than 300 horses a year died from “Swamp Fever” in the pastures of Japan.

Spreading to America

The first case in North America was reported in Wisconsin. By the 1890s, it had appeared in Wyoming where the first extensive U.S. epidemic on record raged in 1901.

By 1909, EIA was reported from 10 states: Nevada, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Montana, North Dakota, Kansas, Colorado and Texas. The number of cases seemed to decrease after that epidemic. Then, in 1935, an EIA case was reported in New England, confirming the spread of the virus in 17 states. Six years later a researcher reported that had spread to 29 states of which 15 had been scientifically confirmed by horse-inoculation tests. (In a horse-inoculation test, examiners draw blood from a horse suspected of having EIA and inject it into a healthy horse. If the healthy horse shows symptoms of EIA after a reasonable incubation period, then they know the suspect has the disease. This was the only method of diagnosis at that time.)

New Hampshire witnessed an outbreak in 1947, causing 77 Thoroughbred horses to either die or be euthanized at Rockingham Park Race Track. The start of the epidemic was traced to a race horse brought from Florida. By now the disease was reported sporadically from 34 of the 48 states.

In the 1960s, EIA was recognized as a major problem in horses on Standardbred farms in New York. In 1970, personnel in the Equine Infectious Disease Laboratory at Cornell University investigated 10 outbreaks, the most serious of which involved 46 horses on a farm of about 425 horses. This outbreak has been reported in detail in veterinary literature. All of these outbreaks were explosive in nature and in most cases one or more horses had died from the infection before the disease was recognized.

In 1965, the United States Livestock Sanitary Association (now known as the U.S. Animal Health Association), along with other national veterinary and horse industry groups, developed positive uniform plans for quelling the disease. This move was brought about in response to widespread epidemics occurring at other racetracks in Maryland, Florida, Washington and Illinois. Their principles, known as the “Prospectus on Equine Infectious Anemia with Guidelines” was instrumental in halting the spread of EIA by the latter part of 1966.

The Namesake

Then, in 1970, Dr. Leroy Coggins of Cornell University developed the first accurate laboratory procedure for diagnosing the disease. Now a

household term among horsemen, the “Coggins Test” is a laboratory procedure designed to detect the presence of antibodies, or virus-fighting units in the blood stream of an animal being tested. The Coggins test does not detect the EIA virus itself, but the scientific community is agreed that the presence of antibodies to fight disease is ample proof that the virus has infected the animal. In 1973 the United States Department of Agriculture designated the Coggins test the official test for determining the presence of EIA; established a procedure for certifying a network of laboratories qualified to run the tests; and prohibited interstate transport of EIA positive “reactors” except for purposes of taking them to an approved slaughterhouse, quarantine site or research facility.

Requirements Made

In October 1973, Florida implemented one of the first rules in the nation, making the Coggins test the official test for detection of the EIA virus in horses at the state level. The Coggins test then became mandatory in the state of Florida for horses being sold, raced, and in most cases, shown or bred. A quarantine directive was imposed upon horses found to be positive. The directive states that “an infected animal has to be kept isolated in approved quarters until death or destroyed.”

In spite of the state being located in the EIA “hot zone” (Gulf coast states), Florida’s EIA Disease Control Program continues to keep the disease incidence at a very low rate. For example, when 1,576 horses were tested in Florida between December 1, 1970 and July 30, 1971, 190 tested positive, or 12 percent. When 120,402 horses were tested in Florida between July 1, 1999 and June 30, 2000, 20 tested positive, or (0.016 percent). This downward trend is a direct result of the effective disease control activities, strict enforcement of EIA regulations and strong support of the state's valuable equine industry. Until a vaccine becomes available in this country, control programs are the only viable option to reduce the risk of transmission from virus-infected equines. Future methods to increase the effectiveness of control programs include: (1) Increasing the number of quarantine farms in areas where large numbers of equines are affected, (2) Increasing revenue generated and allocated to EIA research, and (3) Educating the horse owner of the biological risks of EIA and therefore placing less emphasis on the perceived or psychological threats of the infection.

-- Written by Dr. William Jeter and Summer Best