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Preliminary evaluation of equine respiratory disease in a region of New Zealand

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Inflammatory airway disease (IAD) is one of the most widespread conditions affecting horses world-wide. Over-crowding, stabling conditions and exposure to irritants (such as bedding dust) have been thought to contribute to the development of IAD. Since the majority of sport horses in New Zealand are kept at pasture for prolonged periods, differing from intensive stabling conditions seen in other countries, variations in the type and frequency of respiratory pathologies might exist. In order to investigate this possibility, and determine the most common respiratory conditions affecting horses requiring endoscopic examination, this preliminary epidemiologic study was conducted. A retrospective analysis of 145 respiratory endoscopies was conducted including examinations made at 2 veterinary clinics from June 2010 to October 2012. Respiratory endoscopies results were initially classified as normal or abnormal. Abnormal results were further classified as: IAD, anatomical abnormalities, intermittent airway obstruction, trauma, miscellaneous abnormalities. Presence of tracheal secretions of any kind and quantity warranted classification as (IAD). Overall, 76.5% of the animals requiring a respiratory endoscopy demonstrated abnormalities which justified the examination: the majority of horses (42.7%) displayed some degree of IAD. Other common findings included intermittent dorsal displacement of the soft palate (6.9%); bleeding in the upper respiratory tract (3.45%), and laryngeal hemiplegia (15.2%). Inflammatory airway disease (IAD) is one of the most widespread conditions affecting horses world-wide and it is also prevalent in the population studied, despite different housing and managing practices observed in New Zealand in comparison to other countries. Further studies are needed to investigate subclinical abnormalities and the causes of the IAD in horses kept at pasture.