

 **NEWS RELEASE**

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USDA TO ALLOW IMPORTATION OF NONCOMPETITIVE ENTERTAINMENT HORSES FROM COUNTRIES WITH CONTAGIOUS EQUINE METRITIS

WASHINGTON, June 4, 2008--The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is amending its regulations to allow noncompetitive entertainment horses from countries affected with contagious equine metritis (CEM) to be temporarily imported into the United States under certain conditions.

Current regulations allow for importation of horses from countries affected with CEM to compete in specific events, and the United States Animal Health Association has recommended that APHIS have similar provisions for noncompetitive entertainment horses. Several performance groups have asked for an extension of the current 90-day limit. The horses affected by this rule will not be allowed to have direct contact with horses outside those listed on their permit and may not be used for breeding purposes while in the United States. Other restrictions also apply including monitoring by an accredited veterinarian or APHIS representative and being housed in approved premises.

While CEM does not result in death, it is a highly contagious bacterial venereal disease that affects breeding and fertility, and the United States prohibits the importation of horses from listed regions unless the horses are imported in accordance with certain requirements. However, there is virtually no risk that a horse will transmit the disease through casual contact with horses during a performance, exhibition or exercise as APHIS has strict protocols in place for housing and movement. It is expected that the number of horses coming into the country under the amended rule will be small, perhaps between 1 and 10 performing groups varying in size from 5 to 40 horses in a year.

This final rule is scheduled for publication in the June 5 of the *Federal Register* and becomes effective July 7.

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