CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa - The Iowa Department of Agriculture confirmed that a single case of equine herpesvirus-1 (EHV-1) was recently discovered in Marion, at Crystal Creek Equine Center. A department spokesperson said Monday that the investigation is ongoing.

EHV-1 can be spread through direct contact between horses and can travel through air at short distances. It can cause neurological and respiratory problems in affected animals, and can be deadly, even causing abortions in pregnant horses.

The Iowa Equestrian Center at Kirkwood Community College has already taken steps to avoid the virus. They cancelled a barrel racing that was already scheduled April 4-6, and are now working on disinfecting its 210-stall barn as a precaution. Kirkwood hosts large horse shows and as a result, see lots of horses that visit from out of state.

"We have education through the week, we have horse shows on weekends, and our building is used 7 days a week, 50 weeks a year," said the center's director, Patrick Klatt.

Klatt said because the center has about 3 weeks of down time before its next big event, and because the virus itself has an incubation period of about 2 weeks, the stables should be free of any possible contamination for future visitors.

Director Patrick Klatt said spring is their busiest season, so they're taking steps to make sure the current round of EHV-1 infections doesn't make it to this arena. Klatt is keeping large groups of horses out for the time being.

"We are not going to be using our stall barn for the next two or three weeks, we will take that time to disinfect our stall barn as well as our arena," Klatt explained.

Veterinarian Charles Abraham helped diagnose the EHV-1 case at Crystal Creek Equine Center. He said that horse came from Minnesota, and the symptoms of this strain are troubling.

"Our concern is that the horses in Minnesota and the horses in Wisconsin that had neurological symptoms, and tested positive for EHV-1, but did not test positive for the neurogenic form, our concern is, those horses are still dying," said Dr. Abraham.

Dr. Abraham said like herpes in humans, this strain of equine herpes may have mutated. He said horse owners should watch for signs of neurological damage, such as weakness or an inability to stand. Abraham said practicing good quarantine measures should stem the spread of the virus.

"If you're at a stable where you've got infected horses, don't go to another stable," Abraham told us, adding that horse owners should make sure their animals are up-to-date on shots. "The immunologists recommend that we use a modified live vaccine. The name of that vaccine is Rhinomune."

Abraham said there are anti-viral and anti-inflammatory treatments that can help horses suffering from EHV-1 symptoms, but due to the possible mutation of the strain, it's difficult to tell how effective those will be.