

Biosecurity for Horses



Biosecurity is a set of management practices that reduces the potential for the introduction or spread of disease-causing agents.

Maintaining good biosecurity practices will:

- Help prevent the introduction and spread of exotic and notifiable diseases.
- Control diseases that may occur eg strangles or equine influenza.
- Keep your horse healthy and reduce costs.

Horse keepers should know their horse's normal behaviour and vital signs; changes may indicate the onset of disease.

Remain vigilant for signs and symptoms of disease by checking your horse daily.



If you wish to be notified about incidents of exotic equine diseases in GB, you can subscribe to a text alert service at:

<http://animalhealth.defra.gov.uk/alerts/index.htm>

Everyday biosecurity actions:

- Good hygiene eg washing hands, clothes, equipment and surfaces.
- Regularly clean grooming kit, feed and water buckets, tack, rugs, stables and vehicles used to transport horses.
- Avoid taking vehicles into a yard where there are sick horses.
- Keep horses secure check latches, hinges etc.
- Provide fresh clean water and feed your horse the appropriate type and amount of fodder.

Your new horse:

- Learn the horse's history and ensure it has a valid passport.
- Ensure all vaccinations are up to date eg equine flu, tetanus.
- Know the health status of the premises where the horse was kept previously.
- Consider having your horse checked by a vet prior to purchase.
- Isolate new horses for at least 21 days.
- If in doubt talk to your vet.

Sharing equipment, utensils:

- Use separate grooming kits, rugs and tack for each horse.
- Use separate feed and water buckets.
- Do not share needles, syringes and scalpels.

Contact with neighbouring horses or horses at events/shows:

- Take your own buckets.
- Avoid nose to nose contact between horses.
- Wash your hands after you handle other horses.
- Clean and disinfect your boots and outer clothing after each show.
- Be aware of horses at the yard or stables that may have been exposed to disease eg at shows or events, and speak to your vet if you have any concerns.

Other disease prevention actions:

- Ensure all feed stores are kept clean and tidy, doors are kept shut, windows are covered with fine mesh and feed is stored in vermin proof containers.
- Fix leaky taps, keep gutters/drains clear and remove objects that water can pool in.
- Dispose of dung away from horses and water courses. Keep dung heaps covered and dry to reduce the proximity of possible insect breeding sites.
- Use insecticides, summer sheets, fly rugs and masks to protect the horse from biting insects.
- Ensure all vaccination and worming programmes are up to date.



Report disease:

- If you suspect your horse is unwell, isolate the horse and inform your vet.
- Inform other horse owners at the premises.
- Wear suitable protective clothing that can be washed and disinfected or disposed of.

Photos supplied by Mrs S Voas

Exotic Notifiable Disease

An exotic disease is one not normally found in the UK. A notifiable disease is a disease that must be reported to the local Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA) Office. Notifiable diseases have the potential for serious and rapid spread, animal or public health consequences and can have an impact on international trade.

AHVLA Office

AHVLA Office	Telephone
Ayr	01292 291350
Galashiels	01896 758806
Inverness	01463 728800
Inverurie	01467 626610
Perth	01738 602211

There are many exotic equine diseases but this leaflet will focus on three that pose a larger risk to UK equines.

Equine Infectious Anaemia (EIA)

EIA is a viral infection spread by large biting flies ie horse or stable flies. It is also known as swamp fever. The fly passes the virus from horse to horse. EIA can also be transmitted via blood, contaminated surgical equipment, reused syringes and needles and through placental transmission to the foal. There have been recent incidents of EIA in the UK.

Clinical signs and symptoms of EIA in horses

- Animals may be affected acutely, chronically, or show mild or no symptoms.
- Incubation period varies from days to months, but is generally 1-3 weeks.
- Recurring fever, anaemia, emaciation and death.
- All infected horses become carriers and can be infectious for life.
- The chronic phase of the disease predisposes horses to secondary infection for the rest of their lives.

African Horse Sickness (AHS)

AHS is a viral infection spread by biting midges. The biting midge passes the virus from horse to horse. Horses that recover from AHS have life long immunity to that particular strain. To date this disease has never been seen in UK.

Clinical signs and symptoms of AHS in horses

- Incubation period is 2-14 days.
- **Respiratory form:** High fever, difficulty breathing, mouth open and head hanging down, frothy discharge from nose, sudden death, high death rate (90%).
- **Cardiac form:** Fever, followed by swelling of head and eyes, loss of ability to swallow and possible colic symptoms, pinpoint bleeding in the membranes of the mouth and eyes, slower onset of death, and a death rate of 60%.
- **Mixed form:** Mild respiratory signs followed by the typical swellings of the cardiac form.

West Nile Virus (WNV)

WNV is a viral infection spread by mosquitoes. Horses cannot pass the disease onto animals or humans. To date this disease has never been seen in horses in the UK.

Clinical signs and symptoms of WNV in horses

- Most infected horses show few clinical signs.
- Incubation period is 5-15 days.
- Around 30% will exhibit clinical signs from mild symptoms e.g. loss of appetite, stumbling, to extreme neurological symptoms e.g. paralysis leading to death.

Diagnosis of EIA, AHS and WNV

Positive confirmation is obtained by laboratory testing of a blood sample.

Prevention and control of EIA, AHS and WNV

Control insect populations by limiting breeding places eg areas of standing water.

Protect horses from exposure to biting insects by using insect repellents, screens and avoiding times of the day when insects are most active ie dawn and dusk.

There is no vaccine authorised for use in the EU for either EIA or AHS. There is a vaccine available for WNV.

As with the application of all equine medicines you should discuss their use with your vet as only they will have access to the vaccine.



Further information:

World Horse Welfare, Keep your horse healthy pack:

<http://www.worldhorsewelfare.org/information/disease>

Horseracing Betting and Levy Board, Codes of Practice:

<http://codes.hblb.org.uk/>

British Horse Society Scotland, Strategy to eradicate and prevent Strangles:

<http://www.bhsscotland.org.uk/strangles.html>

Scottish Government, Code of Practice for the Welfare of Equidae:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/04/30154411/0>

ISBN: 978-1-78045-939-4

APS Group Scotland
DPPAS13174 (07/12)