

Fact Sheet

Dealing with a disease outbreak

Introduction

Every horse is vulnerable to infectious diseases, whether they are a competition horse, a happy hack or a field companion.

With the growing number of horses being moved around the country and internationally, disease is a serious risk. Movement also includes travelling to shows and coming into contact with new horses at your yard.

Biosecurity measures can be taken to significantly reduce the risk of spread of infectious agents and is defined as a set of measures designed to break the cycle and reduce the spread of disease.

Applying appropriate equine biosecurity measures as part of your daily routine will help to prevent an outbreak of an infectious disease.



Performing appropriate isolation

Because infective material can be transported on clothing, hands and inanimate surfaces it is important to keep in mind that everything that is in contact with the isolated horse is potentially infectious. It is also important to remember that most disinfectants are inactivated by organic matter e.g. mud and faeces.

The rules of isolation

- Make sure there is minimal amount of shared airspace between the quarantined horses and the rest of the yard. Isolation should be in a separate building or stable
- Keep the isolated horse over ten metres away from the others. Stricter guidelines may be put into place for certain diseases such as EHV-1 which can spread up to 50 metres in a direct line. Ensure that the surfaces are able to be disinfected
- Display signs around the isolation area to indicate quarantine status
- Use separate feeding, mucking out tools, grooming equipment and tack, etc
- Clearly label all the isolation equipment so that it is never mixed up with other equipment
- Set up an appropriate system for disposing of waste
- Ideally, separate staff should care for isolated horses. However, if this is not possible, then the new horse or horses that are isolated should be handled last, morning and night



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Entering the isolation area

When entering the isolation area, wear protective clothing between you and the horse, which should then be left in the isolation area until disinfected, washed at high temperature or carefully disposed of.

This should include: boots, gloves, overalls.

Changing your clothes and footwear can help further reduce the risk of you spreading the infectious disease.

Visitors to the yard

All visitors to the yard will need to be made aware that there are biosecurity rules in place and, where possible, restrict their access to the isolation area. A farrier, for example, could be shoeing on the yard and by walking through the isolation area could pick up an infectious disease on their clothing or footwear and carry it to the next yard they visit.

The visitors should also park as far away as possible from the isolation area.

Using disinfectant

Disinfectant is one of the most important biosecurity measures to prevent and control the spread of equine contagious diseases.

When using disinfectants, always follow the instructions on the label.

Use a DEFRA approved disinfectant as this means it will be government approved to prevent and control many diseases.

For more information please use the following link:

gov.uk/guidance/defra-approved-disinfectant-when-and-how-to-use-it

Conclusions

Equine infectious diseases are becoming more and more common. As a member of the equine community, you have an obligation to implement a biosecurity plan on your yard in the face of an infectious disease outbreak to reduce the risk of further spread.



High risk horses

Any horse that shows clinical signs or has been diagnosed with an infection.

The horse should immediately be put on strict isolation and kept away from other horses.

Follow isolation procedures until your vet advises otherwise.



Medium risk horses

Any horse that has been in contact with high risk horses but is not showing any clinical signs, should also be isolated.

Prevent movement on the yard and keep separate from all other horses. Take temperature twice daily and monitor the horse's vital signs and behaviour.



Low risk horses

All horses that have not had any contact with high risk or medium risk horses can be kept together and continue with normal management.

Take temperature twice daily and monitor the horse's vital signs and behaviour.

Restrict movement to and from the yard.

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This factsheet was created by the VetPartners Equine Team, with assistance from our Marketing Team and Veterinary Regulatory Advisors.

For further information, please contact your local VetPartners Equine Veterinary Practice on:

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