



AN OWNER'S GUIDE TO BIOSECURITY FOR ATTENDING COMPETITIONS AND EXTERNAL EVENTS

The following general advice is designed to help horse owners and competitors reduce the risk of acquiring and spreading equine infections through attending external events.

Before attending an event

- It is good practice to routinely take the rectal temperature of all horses twice daily and record these in a diary, along with any other abnormal health signs (e.g. coughing, nasal discharge, reduced appetite, swellings etc.) It is important that rectal temperatures are taken using an appropriate technique, which can be demonstrated on request by attending veterinary surgeons:
 - It should then be obvious when an animal 'spikes' an abnormally increased rectal temperature (usually $\geq 38.5^{\circ}\text{C}/101.3^{\circ}\text{F}$)
 - A horse 'with a temperature' (also referred to as fever or pyrexia) should be promptly isolated away from other animals and a veterinary examination requested
- Veterinary surgeons may not know the precise cause of the fever when they examine the horse but can take samples at that time. These samples can be tested in a laboratory to pinpoint the infectious agents (usually a virus or bacteria).
 - Knowing the infectious agent involved will help the vet to provide the most appropriate advice for treating the horse, controlling the infection and assessing the risk of spread to other horses.
- It is important **not** to move horses off premises where infectious disease has been recently diagnosed or suspected as it is possible that seemingly healthy animals may be incubating the disease. If these horses are taken to events, they could spread infection to other horses:

Actions to be taken whilst attending the event

- Infections such as Herpes Virus, EHV-1 and Strangles spread most easily through close direct contact between horses, or through indirect contact arising from sharing feed/water buckets and tack such as bits/bridles or humans going between horses without applying appropriate hygiene measures.
- Unlike Equine Influenza, Herpes Virus (EHV-1) and Strangles does not spread readily through the air between horses that are physically separated by more than 10 metres.
- With these two considerations in mind, **the risk of transmission of Herpes Virus and Strangles whilst at an event can be greatly reduced by horse owners and competitors 'keeping themselves and their horses to themselves' and avoiding direct and indirect contact with others.**



Actions to be taken after returning home after the event

- It is good practice to routinely isolate or 'quarantine' horses returning to home premises after attending equine events, where they may have acquired an infection and might act as a source of that infection for resident horses. However in large busy yards when more than one owner is involved this can be incredible difficult. **Where quarantining is not performed it is still very important to routinely and regularly monitor these horses for clinical signs of infectious diseases (and where possible take rectal temperatures) and then isolate and seek veterinary attention as soon as anything abnormal is detected.**
- Quarantine periods of at least 3 weeks are required for horses returning from equine events in order to allow infections acquired at events to show as clinical disease
- The shorter the quarantine period, and the poorer the biosecurity standards applied, the greater the risk that an infectious horse may be re-introduced and that infection will transfer to resident horses.
- The main features of a 'quarantine' of returning competitors should include:
 - Physical separation from resident animals, ideally at distances of greater than 25m.
 - Use of separate dedicated staff and equipment for quarantined and resident horses to avoid indirect transmission between the groups:
 - If this is not possible, the quarantined horses should always be dealt with after all resident horses to avoid indirect spread from quarantine to resident animals
 - Routine collection and recording of rectal temperatures and clinical signs in order to identify signs of infection as early as possible
 - Veterinary examinations should be requested for any horses in quarantine showing clinical signs such as fever, nasal discharge, cough, incoordination etc. Ideally laboratory tests should also be undertaken to determine specific infectious causes:
 - Swabs from the nose can be tested for presence of infectious agents using a specialist laboratory method called PCR
 - Blood samples taken by veterinary surgeons during the early stages of quarantine or ideally prior to attending the event (first sample), and again near the end of 3 weeks quarantine (second sample) are especially useful for demonstrating significantly rising antibody levels against specific infections. This rise in antibody level indicates an immune response by the horse to an infection acquired around the time of the first sample.

NB this factsheet has been compiled using information from the Animal Health Trust.