

EQUESTRIAN

Disease prevention guide for UK horse owners is launched

By Angela Calvert

The launch of the UK's first equine biosecurity booklet, Plan Prevent Protect, is set to help bring the equestrian world in line with farm and human health disease prevention, according to the collaborative authors, XLEquine and the Animal Health Trust (AHT).

The booklet is the result of months of development between the AHT and XLEquine practice members and provides a step-by-step practical guide for horse owners and yard managers to work through with their XLEquine veterinary surgeon to minimise disease risk on yards and maintain the health and welfare of the horses in their care.

Speaking at the recent launch at the AHT in Newmarket, veterinary surgeon Mark Tabachnik, of XLEquine member practice Wright and Morten Veterinary Surgeons, explained the significance of the launch. He said: "For many yard and horse owners, biosecurity is just not on their radar. It only becomes important after they have an outbreak.

"Strangles in particular can have devastating effects which impact not only on horse welfare, but the disruption and paralysis of animal movement also has significant consequences with relationships on the yard, not to mention the financial costs in some cases.

"We wanted to develop a practical guide which pre-empts these issues by helping owners to set in place simple and, in many cases, common sense plans and procedures to prevent a disease outbreak, along with practical steps should the worst happen and an outbreak occurs," said Mr Tabachnik.

"Our veterinary farm colleagues and the medical profession are well ahead in terms of



It is important to identify and respond to signs of illness quickly.

biosecurity measures. It is about changing people's mindset. For example the NHS 'Catch it Bin it Kill it' campaign has been highly successful in adapting our thoughts and actions towards disease spread and consequently many of us are more aware of the importance of good biosecurity in one way or another."

Biosecurity

Mr Tabachnik covered the tips for good biosecurity, which include completing the guide's risk assessment with your vet and setting up an isolation area. "These areas do not have to be big or expensive and all yards have somewhere this can be done – even the corner of a field can suffice.

"Vaccination is important, as is having a policy for new arrivals, but simple things like designated head collars and regular hand washing can all help.

"Early indications are people love the booklet and the opportunity it gives them to talk to their vet and discuss practical solutions to suit their situation. Using the 'red, amber, green' traffic light system set up for use

in an outbreak has gone down well. It is very visual," he added.

Dr Richard Newton, AHT's head of epidemiology and disease surveillance, was also involved in the development of the booklet and he believes changing the habits of horse and yard owners and the way they think about biosecurity is going to be crucial going forward.

He said: "Practical biosecurity measures are an insurance policy but, contrary to many people's beliefs, most of it is simple, inexpensive and common sense.

"Large yards used by multiple horse owners with a 'hands-off' yard owner are the most challenging because usually there is no-one to drive things forward collectively. But a good starting point in these situations is to talk to your vet."

Dr Newton outlined the major disease threats to the UK horse population which are the equine influenza virus (EIV), strangles, and equine herpesvirus-1 (EHV-1). He said although EIV was rarely fatal, it did spread very rapidly through and between groups of horses and posed a massive

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MARK TABACHNIK

threat to equestrian activities, adding vaccination remains the best tool for the control of EIV.

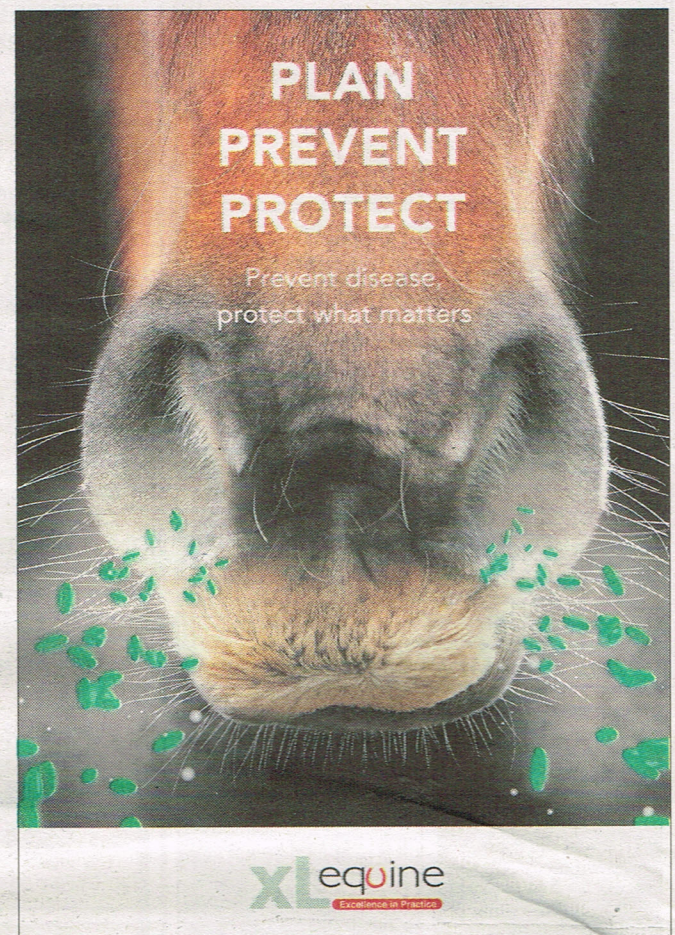
However, he explained the virus is constantly evolving and an important part of the work of the AHT along with other World Organisation for Animal Health laboratories is surveillance, with data being collated and disseminated so new vaccines can be developed to combat relevant strains of the virus.

Damage

One of the major problems with strangles, said Dr Newton, is the fact many horses are carriers but display no outward signs of the disease, and they can do tremendous damage unless they are identified.

Therefore, it is important to respond quickly to an animal showing signs of illness and try to identify the source as this may not be obvious – ignoring signs

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The XLEquine booklet is essential reading for horse owners.

The Plan Prevent Protect booklet

THE Plan Prevent Protect booklet gives an introduction to the contagious diseases which can affect horses, such as equine influenza and strangles, as well as those which might affect foals.

In addition, there is information about exotic diseases we might see at some point in the future in the UK.

The booklet also includes a centrefold risk assessment guide for owners to complete with their vet, plus guidance on setting up a biosecurity

plan and dealing with a disease outbreak.

It is available from XLEquine member practices; ask your vet for more details. For horse owners whose practice is not a member of XLEquine, the booklet is available to view at www.xlequine.co.uk/content/plan-prevent-protect and it is available to buy online for £5.

XLEquine's Mark Tabachnik advises horse owners ask their vet for support in completing the risk assessment and putting a plan in place.

and hoping they will go away is not an option, he said.

EHV-1 is a disease which has to be managed, said Dr Newton, as there is no prospect of it being eradicated and vaccination is not an option. It is a disease which can pose a significant threat to

equine life, he said, and most healthy horses are latently infected with the virus which lies dormant until it is reactivated, like cold sores do in humans. Therefore, targeted surveillance and a rapid, effective response to any outbreaks is vital.

Top tips for biosecurity

- Know your enemy – be aware of the common contagious diseases as well as the exotic diseases which need to be on our radar
- Pay attention to and have policies for good hygiene,

- new arrivals and vaccination
- Be honest about your risk levels – carry out a risk assessment, identify main areas of risk and look at ways to tackle them
- Set-up an isolation facility

- and have a policy for dealing with isolated horses
- Have a new arrivals policy
- Recognise signs of diseases early
- Think about disease control when taking your horse out



Practical biosecurity is simple, inexpensive and common sense, says XLEquine's Mark Tabachnik.