

Avoid your horse having nose to nose contact with new or strange horses



Protect your yard from devastating equine diseases by putting in place a simple management plan

Protect your horse

Owners and yard managers are being urged to embrace good hygiene measures, in a bid to prevent the spread of equine disease, and control any outbreaks should they occur.

According to veterinary experts, implementing simple measures can make a big difference in controlling contagious diseases.

Outbreaks of conditions such as strangles, flu and equine herpes virus can bring yards to a standstill, leading to huge vet bills and potentially halting equine activities in the local area.

A new biosecurity booklet, Plan Prevent Protect, has been launched by XL Equine – a group of 35 veterinary practices – in partnership with the Animal Health Trust (AHT). It contains advice to minimise disease risk on yards and maintain the health and welfare of horses.

"For many yard and horse owners, biosecurity is just not on their radar," says vet Mark Tabachnik of XL Equine member practice, Wright & Morten



Even washing your hands regularly can help prevent disease

TIP from the TOP
New or sick horses should be tended to after other equines on the yard, to lower the risk of passing on an infection.



Disinfect yard tools regularly

can be housed until you can be sure they are disease-free. Mark recommends keeping them separate for a minimum of three weeks and having a blood test done to rule out strangles. "These areas don't have to be massive and all yards should have somewhere that this can be done – even the corner of a field can suffice," says Mark. "It doesn't have to cost money, it just needs to be practical."

- Other recommended measures include:-
- Having separate tack, rugs, feed buckets and grooming kit for each horse;
 - Keeping vaccinations up to date;
 - Cleaning feed and water buckets daily;
 - Washing grooming kits regularly;
 - Ensuring visitors to the yard have changed their clothes if they have previously been in contact with other horses.
 - Avoiding nose-to-nose contact with other horses, especially when you are away from your yard.

"Even simple things like regularly washing your hands can help," says Mark, who advises setting up a meeting with other yard owners to gain their support and kick-start a biosecurity plan.

TIP from the TOP
Communicate your biosecurity plan to everyone on the yard, to ensure everyone follows the new rules put in place.

Identify your risk

The Plan Prevent Protect booklet contains a handy questionnaire that you can fill out, with input from your vet, which assesses the level of risk your yard is at from equine disease.

It considers how many horses are vaccinated, how often horses are taken off site to compete, the frequency of new arrivals and whether there are equines on neighbouring premises.

Dr Richard Newton, head of epidemiology and disease surveillance of the AHT, helped to develop the booklet.

He believes that changing the thinking and habits of horse and yard owners in the way they think about biosecurity is going to be crucial thinking forward in the future.

Veterinary Surgeons in Cheshire. "It only becomes important to them after they have had an outbreak.

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

"What we have put together is a set of important management practices that should reduce the potential for the introduction or spread of diseases."

Simple measures

One of the key biosecurity measures advised is setting up an isolation area, where new horses

Sickness action plan

If a horse shows signs he could be suffering from a disease such as strangles or flu, the yard should be closed and no horses allowed to leave or enter.

As most illnesses have an incubation period and you can't tell whether horses are affected, Mark recommends dividing horses into groups, depending on their risk category. Each group should be kept separate to the others.

High risk: These will be horses showing clinical signs of a disease or those with a confirmed infection;

Medium risk: Horses that have had contact with the high risk horses, but are not yet showing signs that they have the disease.

Low risk: This will include horses that have had no contact with the above two groups. However, they should still be tested to rule out any chance that they have been exposed to disease.



If you suspect a disease outbreak contact your vet

"Practical biosecurity measures are an insurance policy, but contrary to many beliefs most of it is simple, inexpensive and common sense," he states.

"Large, multi-horse owner yards with a 'hands off' yard owner are the most challenging because usually there is no one around to drive things forward collectively.

"However, a good starting point in these situations is to talk to your vet."



● The Plan Prevent Protect booklet is available free to clients of XL Equine practices, or you can order a copy for £5 from www.xlequine.co.uk.