

Horse owners given head start on protecting against disease

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Everyone from the private horse owner through to the managers of large commercial establishments were provided with key advice on how to protect their animals and businesses from the threat of disease at The British Horse Society's 2014 Welfare Conference in partnership with SAC Consulting Veterinary Services.



Contagious disease in horses can be devastating and have long lasting effects. In addition to the obvious and very significant risk to equine health, outbreaks can cause businesses to close, reputations to be unjustly damaged beyond repair and entire competition seasons to be lost.

This is why The British Horse Society was delighted to work with SAC Consulting Veterinary Services (a division of SRUC) to deliver 'Biosecurity – Protecting Horses and Businesses'.

The Conference brought together a number of internationally renowned experts. Nicolas de Brauwere, Head of Welfare at Redwings Horse Sanctuary and Chairman of the National Equine Welfare Council, began the day with a thought-provoking session highlighting the biosecurity challenges of introducing new horses and changing populations and advising on the implementation of effective quarantine procedures.

"I hope that the conference has helped people recognise that all sorts of infectious diseases are a risk to their horses," he said.

"Hopefully they've also had the opportunity to learn some measures they can take to protect their



horses, whether that's against Strangles, Flu, Herpes, or something worse in the future."

Dr Andrew Waller, Head of Bacteriology, and Dr Richard Newton, Head of Epidemiology and Disease, at the Animal Health Trust were next to present, using case studies of equine herpes virus and Strangles outbreaks to demonstrate what can be learnt about effective disease control.

They also explored the role that testing and vaccination plays in biosecurity. Dr Newton warned that people must not to get too complacent. He said: "Several years of success doesn't mean that you have then eradicated the risk. Unfortunately time and time again we have seen people around the world think that they don't need to keep

investing.

"When they take away that investment, by stopping vaccinating against flu for example, the disease will come in and cause the same problems."

Alistair Cox, Veterinary Investigation Officer at SAC Consulting Veterinary Services, spoke about the Premium Assured Strangles Scheme (PASS), explaining that the scheme had been launched to protect member yards against the uncontrolled spread of this disease through a practical programme of testing and biosecurity procedures.



The Scheme generated lots of interest and questions from the delegates who were also given information on how to join.

"The premium assured strangles scheme allows yards to visibly demonstrate their commitment to the control of Strangles, enhancing their status in the equine community, and leading the way in the ultimate goal of eradicating this terrible disease," Cox said.



It wasn't just the most well-known diseases in the spotlight. Dr John Keen, Director of Equine Clinical Services, The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, looked at the emerging threat to the UK equine population from exotic diseases and the practical steps that people can take to minimise risk.

"People have got to be aware that these diseases might occur," he said.

"The Bluetongue virus coming into the UK recently has been a really good example of how these things can come in, despite the fact that you think they're not going to," he said.."

In the afternoon, delegates broke down into smaller groups for more interactive sessions.

Nicolas de Brauwere provided a rare opportunity for delegates to 'have a go' at using an endoscope in the classroom.

They were able to experience a little of what their vet would be doing when recovering chondroids from guttural pouches of Strangles carriers.

Alistair Cox used glitter stuck to a model horse to demonstrate to his group how easily disease can spread.

Two volunteers entered the stable to tend to the horse's 'ringworm' – one with no protection and the other attired in overalls, gloves and shoe covers.

The difference in the amount of 'disease' transferred was certainly food for thought.



"With a lot of the diseases that we're talking about the organisms that cause them are not visible," said Cox.

"People often don't worry too much about what they can't see or just don't realise that they're spreading disease – so this demonstration enables people to see what they're carrying on their feet and what's still stuck to their hands after they've come out of the stable."

Delegates also had the opportunity to risk assess their yard and think about how to create a suitable biosecurity plan.

Mark Tabachnik from Wright and Morten Veterinary Surgeons (members of XLEquine) who ran the session advised: "People need to think about how much risk there is of their yard, or yards that they deal with, contracting contagious diseases.

"You need to consider things like new arrival policies, vaccinations policies, going to shows – all the sorts of things that equate to high, medium or low risk yards."

For more information about the Premium Assured Strangles Scheme (PASS) run by SAC Consulting, check out their Facebook page (opens in new window).

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