

Improving biosecurity on equine yards

XLEquine, in collaboration with the Animal Health Trust, has launched a guide to preventing infectious diseases on equine yards.

The booklet, entitled 'Plan Prevent Protect' gives an overview of the most important diseases that affect horses in the UK, including strangles, equine influenza and equine herpesvirus. It also highlights diseases that may come into the UK from abroad due to the movement of horses across geographic boundaries. These include African horse sickness, West Nile virus and equine infectious anaemia. The aim is for horse owners and yard managers to work through the booklet alongside their veterinarian in order to reduce risks and improve biosecurity.

'For many yard and horse owners, biosecurity is just not on their radar. It only becomes important after they have had an outbreak,' said Mark Tabachnik of XLEquine. '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 for relationships

on the yard, not to mention the financial costs in some cases.'

The booklet includes a 'yard risk assessment' section, in which yard owners or users

can gauge the risk of infectious disease on the premises. It includes questions on the size and scale of the yard, movements of horses on and off the premises and the use of basic biosecurity measures.

The overall aim, say representatives of XLEquine, is to bring biosecurity on equine yards up to the same standards seen on other farms and in public health.

'Our veterinary farm colleagues and the medical profession are well ahead in terms of biosecurity measures,' said Mr Tabachnik. '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.'

Mr Tabachnik also recommended some simple but effective biosecurity measures for equine yards, including having an isolation area, using designated headcollars and regular handwashing.

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