

Is your horse at risk?

Find out if your yard is an equine disease risk and learn how to protect your horse with advice from a specialist team of vets

Knowing how to keep your horse safe from the risk of disease or infection is the best way to ensure he stays protected from any contagious diseases. Using this helpful guide - which has been designed by the vets within a specialist group called XLEquine - you can risk assess your yard, spot potential problems, create a plan to help prevent disease outbreaks and go on to ensure the health and wellbeing of your horse and any others on your yard.

To begin the process, you need to identify any risks your yard presents. So discover what risk category your yard falls into - low, medium or high - using the simple scoring system over the page, and to make the most of this guide:

- Answer each of the 11 questions over the page as honestly as possible
- At the end, calculate your score by adding up the points you get for each of your answers (these are the red numbers in the brackets after each answer)
- Once you know which category you fall into, look through your answers to see which areas present the most risks
- Use the rest of this feature to find out what actions you can take to reduce risks on your yard, with advice from the experts at XLEquine

Introducing XLEquine



This feature is brought to you by the experts at XLEquine. This specialist division of XLVets is an established group of practices working together to deliver a high quality of veterinary care. Currently XLEquine has 35 members across the UK, ranging from large equine referral hospitals to mixed veterinary practices incorporating over 120 equine vets. As a group of independently owned veterinary practices the XLEquine team works together sharing knowledge, experience and skills to deliver the highest quality equine care to their clients.

To find an XLEquine practice in your area or for more information visit www.xlequine.co.uk



Answer the questions over the page to risk assess your yard and help protect your horse from disease or infection

Risk assess your yard

Name of yard _____

Name of person responsible for yard _____

1. Type of yard

Choose which of the following best describes your yard or, if multiple answers apply, tick the one with the highest risk score:

- a. Private leisure (1)
- b. Livery yard (2)
- c. Riding school (2)
- d. Private stud (2)
- e. Competition yard (3)
- f. Breaking yard (3)
- g. Public stud (3)
- h. Horse dealer's yard (4)

2. Number of horses on the yard

- a. 0-7 (0)
- b. 8-15 (1)
- c. 16-30 (2)
- d. More than 30 (3)

3. Stabling arrangements

- a. Stable groups of up to 7 horses (0)
- b. Stable groups of more than 7 horses (1)
- c. Mixed or changing groups (2)

4. Horses' ages

(tick all that apply)

- a. All adult 5 years+ (0)
- b. Youngstock 1-5 years (1)
- c. Foals (1)
- d. Brood mares (1)

5. Average frequency of new arrivals

- a. Once a year or less (0)
- b. More than once a year and less than once a month (1)
- c. More than once a month (2)

6. Frequency of horses from this yard mixing with other

Think carefully about the set up of your yard as you assess the risks and fill out your form



7. Frequency of horses visiting the yard, eg for lessons

- a. Never (0)
- b. Once or twice a month (1)
- c. Weekly (2)

8. Do horses on the yard have contact over fences with horses on neighbouring premises?

- a. Yes (2)
- b. No (0)

9. Do any yard members handle horses kept on other premises?

- a. Yes (1)
- b. No (0)

10. Have you ever had a case of strangles confirmed on your yard?

- a. Never (0)
- b. Yes, in the last 2-3 years (1)
- c. Yes, in the last 1 year (2)

11. How many horses on the yard are vaccinated for equine influenza?

- a. All (0)
- b. Some (1)
- c. None (2)

Add up your points (the numbers in brackets) to calculate your yard risk score

Risk category Low risk 1-6 Medium risk 7-11 High risk >12

Areas/practices of highest risk

.....

Proposed action to be taken

.....

Spotting a problem

To reduce the risk of an outbreak of disease on your yard, every horse owner should be able to spot the signs of a problem. This includes recognising the signs and symptoms. Need a reminder? You can find a full list of the most common contagious equine diseases along with their cause, symptoms, diagnosis, treatment and prevention measures at www.xlequine.co.uk. However, if a horse on your yard displays any of these signs - fever, coughing, nasal discharge, lymph node abscesses, diarrhoea, abortion in pregnant mares or a lack of coordination, call your vet immediately.

Know what's normal

Along with knowing the symptoms of infectious diseases, it's important to recognise when your horse's behaviour isn't normal as this will enable you to spot when something changes. To do this, check him daily (or as often as possible) from head to hoof, feeling and looking for any lumps or bumps that weren't there before. Keep a notebook at the yard to jot down anything you find, and keep regular records of his normal temperature, pulse and respiration (TPR).

Taking your horse's temperature, pulse and respiration is easy when you know how, as we explain here:

Temperature: A normal temperature should be between 37.5 and 38.5 degrees celsius. To take your horse's temperature (using either a mercury or digital thermometer) lubricate the end of the thermometer with petroleum jelly. Stand

Keep track of what's normal for your horse by checking him daily



slightly to the side of your horse so you're safe and gently insert it into his bottom. Hold the thermometer at a slight angle to press it against the side of his rectum, otherwise you'll take the temperature of his dung.

Pulse: A normal resting pulse is 28-38 beats per minute. Take his pulse by either pressing two fingers against the transverse facial artery, which is slightly below and to the rear of his eye, or the sub-mandibular artery on the inside edge of his lower jaw. Once you've

located his pulse count for 30 seconds and times this by two to get his pulse rate per minute.

Respiration: Your horse's respiration measures the number of breaths your horse takes per minute. The normal resting rate is 12-15 breaths per minute (bpm). Stand a few feet from his side and watch his ribcage rise and fall - one rise and fall is one breath. Time the number of breaths he takes in 30 seconds and double it to get his bpm.

Good hygiene practises

Once you're confident you could spot a problem and recognise a change in your horse, it's essential to focus on general hygiene practices on the yard. These measures must be put in place and followed, for example:

- Keep the tack, rugs and all equipment of different horses separate and clean
- Wash your hands before and after attending to your horse or others
- Clean feed and water buckets or mangers regularly, at least every day
- Regularly clean anything (including vehicles) used when transporting horses
- Dispose of muck away from horses and any water courses, and keep muckheaps dry and covered where possible to reduce the attraction for biting insects
- Keep feed store areas clean and tidy and ensure all containers are vermin-proof
- Fix leaking taps, keep gutters and drains clear and remove any objects that water can pool in
- Use fly repellents and sheets to protect horses from biting insects



Prevent bacteria spreading by cleaning your kit regularly



Simple measures like fly protection can reduce risks



Isolate any infectious horses

Take fast action

If an outbreak of infectious disease does occur on your yard the key is to act fast with these four steps:

- Close the yard. No horses should be allowed to leave or new horses to enter. Any visiting professionals, such as vets or farriers, should be alerted
- Infected horses should be isolated
- Horses should be separated into risk categories and monitored for signs of disease
- Any appropriate vaccinations should be given by your vet

Regulate movement on and off your yard

If your risk assessment checklist showed that general movement of horses onto and off the yard increased your final risk score, this section will be of help.

Most livery yards adopt an incubation period policy for new horses entering the yard. This is a brilliant way to protect the horses on the yard, but there are further measures you can take to prevent any unwanted nasties arriving. For example, have just one main entrance to the yard that everyone uses and ask visitors to wear clean clothes and shoes when attending the yard. You should also pin-point a parking area for everyone to use, away from the horses, to prevent disease-carrying organisms being tracked from car tyres to the horses and, if possible, keep a record of the date and time of any visitors so they can be easily traced in the event of an outbreak of infectious disease.

These might sound like time consuming measures, but once certain rules are in place, they'll be easy to follow and go a long way to keeping your yard safe.



Follow careful management procedures to reduce the risk of disease from new arrivals to the yard



Blood tests can be used to rule out any underlying infections

Monitor arrivals

The introduction of a new horse is a common way for unwanted disease to spread, and as many contagious diseases can have a significant incubation period where horses will still appear healthy, a strict isolation period should apply. To do this, follow these simple guidelines:

- Isolate new horses for at least three weeks

- Ensure isolated horses are cared for by separate staff, or after the rest of the horses on the yard, ensuring hands and boots are washed before leaving the isolation area
- All new horses must be up to date with flu vaccinations, and any who haven't been vaccinated, or whose vaccinations have lapsed, should complete a primary course, along with a further week in isolation
- A strangles blood test should be carried out in the week before the horse's move



Gather everyone on your yard to discuss your risk assessment plans



Delegate one person who can 'audit' the safety level of yard procedures

Set up a yard plan

Now you have your risk score and are up to date on hygiene practices, safe movement on and off the yard and spotting the signs of a problem, you can put a step-by-step 'APPEAR' guide in place for everyone to work from:

Assess: Complete the risk assessment scoring system and discuss your overall risk level and areas of concern with your vet.

Produce: Create (ideally in consultation with your vet) a plan of action for your yard to tackle any areas of risk.

Preparation: Ensure all yard equipment and facilities will enable yard members to follow your action plan.

Education: Meet with everyone on the yard to discuss the results of your risk assessment and the new plan of action. At this stage, each yard member must be made aware of their responsibilities and be given a copy of the plan to follow.

Audit: Select one member on the yard, if not the yard owner, to regularly check that the action plan is being followed and procedures are being completed properly.

Reassessment: Set a date to reassess the plan on an annual basis (or following any outbreaks) in order to highlight any new, or continuing, areas of risk. 📧