Equine Biosecurity Basics

What is Equine Biosecurity?

Biosecurity is a set of management principles, actions, precautions and procedures that protect the health of animals by minimizing the transmission of potentially infectious disease onto or off of equine premises by:

- new horses
- other animals
- wildlife
- people
- equipment
- feed
- water
- insects
- pests

Biosecurity also protects animals, farms, the equine community and the industry as a whole against biological agents that have the potential to affect the health of an animal adversely. These include:

- bacteria
- viruses
- fungi
- other microbes

Basic Strategy of Disease Prevention

You can help prevent the introduction of disease and control further transmission in a herd, facility or community by implementing access zones, physical barriers and hygiene practices.

By making good biosecurity a habit when travelling and at home, you will help keep your horses healthy.

Disease Transmission

Horses can be exposed to diseases through common sources of infectious agents, including:

- other horses
- people transferring disease on clothing, hands or shoes
- feces
- insect vectors
- rodents, birds, other domestic animals, pets and wildlife
- blood
- aborted fetuses and fetal fluid
- infected semen
- direct contact
- fomites (inanimate objects capable of carrying microorganisms, such as buckets, wheelbarrows, shovels, tack, etc.)

When are Horses more Susceptible to Disease?

Horses can become more susceptible to disease when they are:

- in high density populations
- commingled
- stressed
- transported
- exposed to horses that are sick
- exposed to horses that are apparently healthy, but are shedding infectious microorganisms

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Stress can cause increased susceptibility for disease in horses by affecting their immune system and lowering defenses against biological agents.

Horses that participate at events away from their home premises can experience stress associated with travel, an unfamiliar environment and competition.

Stress can result from conditions at:

- breeding farms
- boarding facilities
- training barns
- show grounds
- equestrian events
- racetracks
- veterinary clinics
- transportation activities

Dealing with Initial Disease at the Barn

If an outbreak occurs, despite all efforts to keep infectious disease out of your barn, it is very important to work with your veterinarian and put plans and procedures in place to deal with the outbreak.

Consider all sick horses as infectious to others, until a veterinarian has made a diagnosis and assessed the degree of contagiousness.

Always remember that an apparently healthy horse can shed infectious agents.

Horse Owners' Responsibilities

As a horse owner, you have the responsibility to prevent and protect your horse from catching infectious diseases.

You also are responsible for helping to protect the equine community that surrounds you at home and that you become part of when you travel to equine events.

Your veterinarian can help you develop a vaccination protocol and a biosecurity plan.

By establishing strict equine biosecurity practices at home and while travelling, you will help ensure safety for your own horses and the other horses with which you may come into contact.

Every horse owner needs to do everything they can to reduce the risk of introducing an infectious disease to their property and horses.

Taking basic precautions is common sense and once you are in the habit, they are quite easy to implement.

Reducing the incidence of infectious disease in our animals saves time, money and enhances the quality of life for both horse and owner.

Additional Resources

- **National Farm and Facility Level Biosecurity Standard for the Equine Sector** (Canadian Food Inspection Agency)
- **Equestrian Canada Biosecurity guideline and standard**
- **American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) Biosecurity Guidelines**

Contact us

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For more information, you can also contact your veterinarian.

Available in alternate formats upon request.