



Equine Infectious Disease Advisory Group



Reducing Disease Risk Together

Advice notes for venues

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Equine Infectious Disease Advisory Group (BEF-EIDAG)

Reducing disease risk together: Advice notes for venues which host horse gatherings

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The BEF-EIDAG produced these notes for British Equestrian, its member bodies (MBs) and venues that host MBs' affiliated competitions and gatherings to help reduce risk of infectious disease spread when horses gather. We encourage sharing and will be delighted if other organisations would like to adapt them for their own purposes. Please contact office@bef.co.uk to request a copy in a format suitable for further publication. The advice notes will be reviewed and where necessary updated by BEF-EIDAG on a regular basis.

Disclaimer

The information, including but not limited to, text, graphics, images and other material contained in this handbook are for information purposes only. The content of the handbook is not intended to be a substitute for professional veterinary advice, diagnosis, or treatment, nor should veterinary surgeons rely on it as a substitute for their own knowledge and expertise in dealing with the facts and circumstances of individual cases.

Horse owners should always seek the advice of their vet regarding a medical condition or treatment and before undertaking a new health care regime for their horse and should never disregard professional veterinary advice or delay in seeking it because of something contained in this handbook.

BEF-EIDAG advise **veterinary surgeons** that consent should be obtained from horse owners/ agents prior to use of a vaccination regime that is not consistent with data sheet recommendations and would therefore be considered "off licence". Similarly, consent from horse owners/agents should be obtained prior to administration or prescription of medications not licensed for use in the horse.

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Infectious Disease Management

Why is it critical to reduce the risk of equine infectious diseases?

Infectious diseases are caused by micro-organisms such as bacteria, viruses and fungi. Not all infectious diseases spread between horses but these advice notes focus on those that do. These infectious disease represents a major threat to equine health and welfare, and can lead to cancellation and curtailment of competitions at local or national levels. Mixing of horses at competitions can enable infectious diseases to spread through various routes, and it is a clear responsibility of venues which host horse gatherings to mitigate against this risk. Minimising the risk of disease spread will both protect the welfare of horses and protect venues from reputational damage which could arise if an infectious disease outbreak occurs at or as a result of a gathering at their premises.

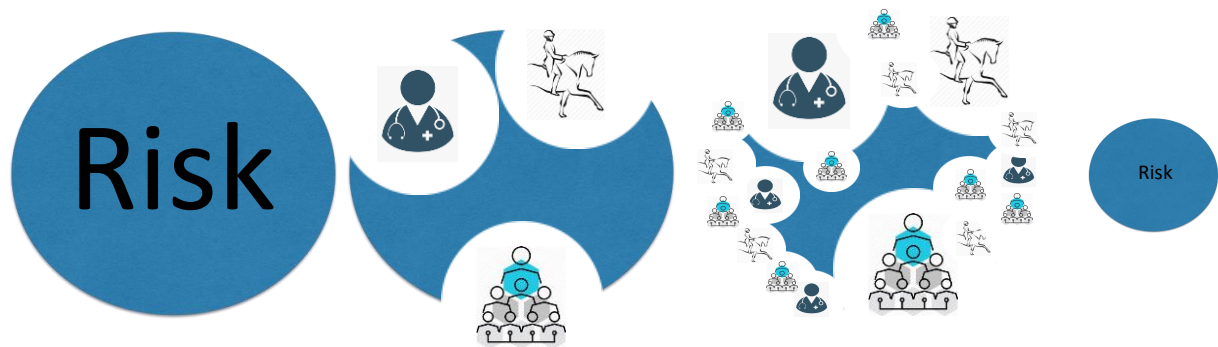
These advice notes have been prepared by British Equestrian’s (BEF) Equine Infectious Disease Advisory Group (BEF-EIDAG) a group of volunteers with expertise in equine medicine and infectious diseases. They are based on the current best evidence and will be regularly reviewed and up-dated as necessary in the future. The group’s primary responsibility is to advise BEF’s member bodies (MBs). However, the advice we prepare is

also relevant to the venues which host gatherings both affiliated to these MBs and unaffiliated meetings.

The specific aim of these advice notes for venues which host horse gatherings is to provide practical guidance to help individuals or groups who own or manage equestrian venues. For each specific disease, the risk reduction strategy is summarised but for further general background information about the specific diseases, please refer to BEF EIDAG's [Advice Notes for Member Bodies and Organisers of Equine Gatherings](#). This wider document also contains suggestions for points which MB and venues should reach agreement on to ensure the highest possible standards of biosecurity and reduce risk of spread of infectious disease at equine gatherings.

Horse owners and riders seeking information about equine disease in general are likely to find resources contained in BEF's ['Diseases to know about'](#) section more useful.

A team effort for risk reduction

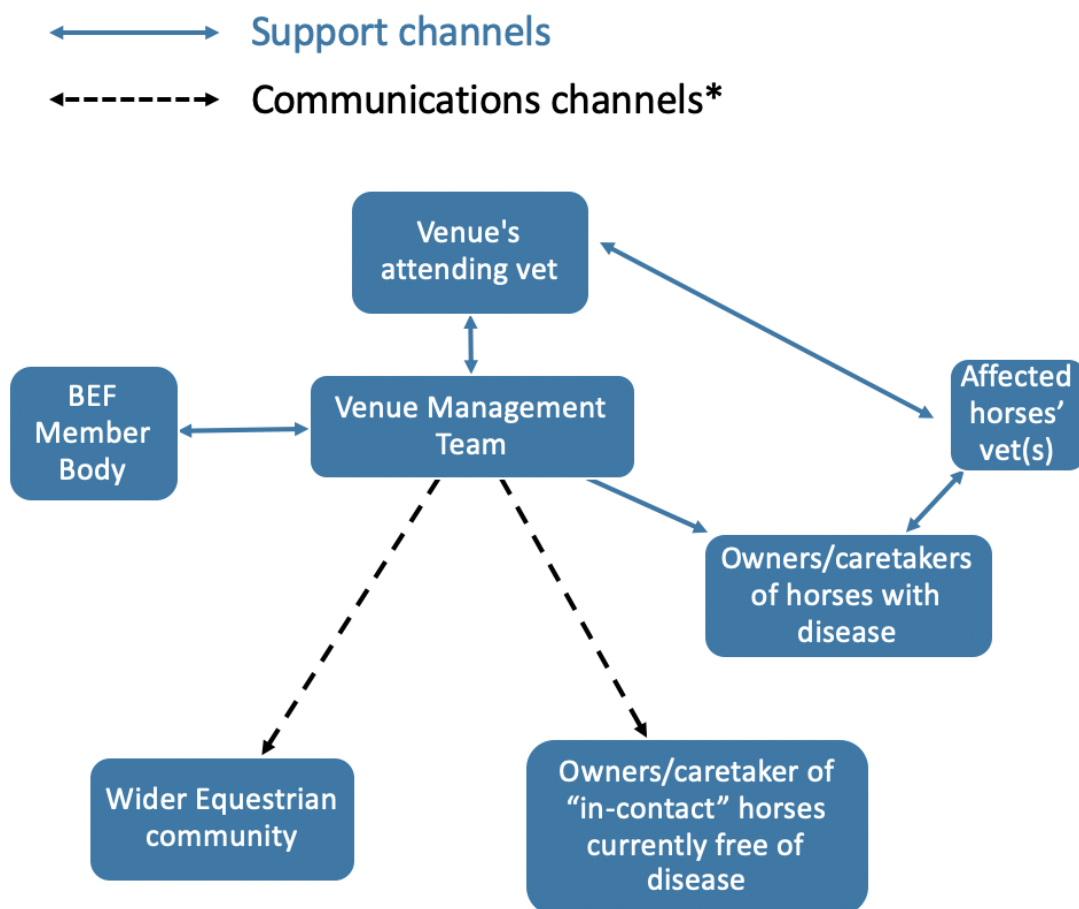


Each stakeholder group contributes to risk reduction
& together multiple individual interventions and strategies reduce the total risk. Venues can make important contributions to a collective effort to reduce infectious disease risk.

Infectious disease risk can be managed and reduced, however it is not realistic to expect that it can be removed completely. There is no single strategy which can reduce the risk of every infectious disease and some interventions are more effective in one disease than others. By combining multiple interventions and strategies, the overall risk of infectious disease can be reduced.

BEF's infectious disease support network

Venue managers and their veterinary advisors cannot and should not feel that they have to assume sole responsibility for infectious disease control or dealing with infectious disease outbreaks. They should work and communicate closely with MBs, particularly when disease occurs. There is considerable expertise in infectious disease management which MBs can utilise and, where necessary MBs can access support from BEF's Emergency Response Group (ERG), a team of experts with national oversight who can liaise with the MBs to support venues and local organisers when infectious disease occurs. Communication is critical to managing any challenge: venues and their vets should feel that they can rely upon and trust MBs and the ERG to work together with venues to minimise the impact of infectious disease.



* The BEF MB's veterinary advisors will work with venues to help decide and support venues on the extent and modes of communication necessary. Social media has provided us with excellent tools for rapid dissemination of information and alerts. However, communications with "in-contacts" and/or the wider equestrian community may not be beneficial if the risk of disease spread is minimal. Venues can be confident that information they provide to MB will remain confidential unless the venue wishes to make its identity known for the benefit of horse welfare.

Which diseases should equestrian venues focus on?

Clearly any equine disease is regrettable. However, from the perspective of equestrian venues, it is important that efforts are focussed on those diseases where horse mixing is an

important contributor to disease transmission. Infectious diseases can be spread between horses either directly (for example from one horse coughing near another), or indirectly via the transfer of live infectious material on someone's hands, bedding, fencing or stable walls or doors, a piece of equipment or in a water bucket or trough. Some diseases are spread indirectly via insect vectors that transfer the infection between the animals on which they feed.

Infectious diseases are broadly classified as endemic or exotic in the UK. **Endemic diseases** are defined as diseases which regularly occur at some level within the UK's horse and pony population. Equine influenza, Equine herpes virus (EHV-1 and -4) and strangles are examples of infectious diseases which are endemic in the UK. These examples are all respiratory diseases and can cause outbreaks involving variable numbers of animals. Influenza, in particular, can quickly spread over fairly large distances, certainly encompassing the typical area of a competition, whereas EHV and strangles generally require fairly close contact between horses to spread. Other endemic diseases which could spread within venues include gastrointestinal infections, such as Salmonella and coronavirus, and the skin condition ringworm, the spread of which also requires close contact between horses or with infected material. Most adult horses have a degree of immunity to ringworm; however, it is important because it can infect humans, particularly children, old and immunocompromised people, and it can stop individual horses being able to wear tack, thus preventing them from competing.

Exotic diseases are those which do not generally occur in a given region but which may be introduced by infected animals or infected insect vectors and create disease outbreaks amongst the native population. Because UK horses will be most unlikely to have ever encountered specific exotic diseases, they have no immunity and are very vulnerable to severe illness if it does occur. Some equine exotic diseases can involve another species, including humans, and all have the potential to endanger the national herd; consequently, there are UK Government regulations on how to manage suspected cases. Diseases which must be reported to government are known as "**notifiable diseases**".

Venue managers should certainly be aware of important equine infectious diseases and syndromes and further information is available in the [Advice Notes for Equine Gatherings document](#). Please visit the BEF website for further [useful information on equine infectious diseases](#).

Avoiding mixing horses of different categories at venues

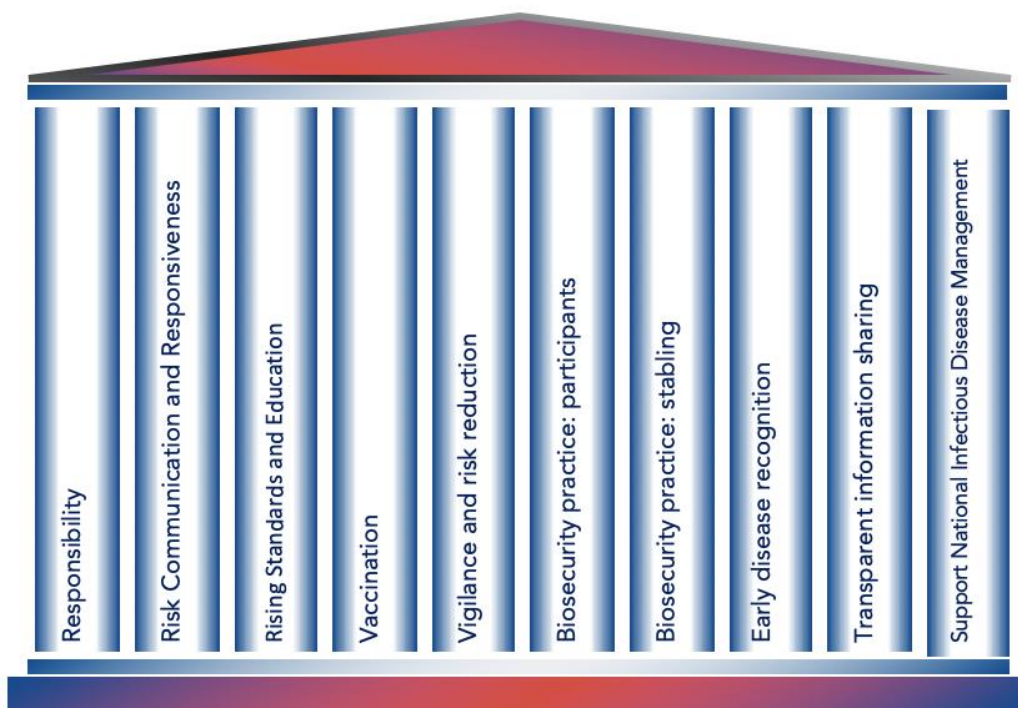
Many equestrian centres have a population of horses living on the premises which may be at risk of introducing or contracting infectious disease to/from horses visiting the venue. For clarity we have used the terms "permanent residents" and "visiting horses" to distinguish these groups in the advice set out below. As a general principle, housing and exercising permanent residents as far away as possible from visiting horses and reducing the chances that personnel or other species such as dogs, rodents, insect and birds from acting as vehicles for spreading infection at a venue, will protect both groups. There is no specific safe distance, and the ability of pathogens to spread varies from disease to disease. A few metres are better than nothing and the longer the distance the better.

Some gatherings offer classes where some horses are covered by regulations from an equestrian body or association regarding vaccination and declarations of health status, sometimes including mandatory temperature taking, while other horses visiting the same venue on the same day have no such oversight. Where affiliated and non-affiliated classes

are occurring simultaneously, BEF-EIDAG strongly advises venues that they should insist that **all** horses (i.e. affiliated and non-affiliated competitors) comply with regulations on vaccination and health status declarations. This will not only protect the unaffiliated horses but also help to raise awareness of vaccination's benefits and help to educate horse owners that they should only consider transporting or compete horses which they confident are healthy.

Pillars and principles of equine infectious disease management

The BEF-EIDAG's advice to MBs on reducing risk of infectious disease are available in the [Advice Notes for Equine Gatherings document](#). The advice to BEF's member bodies sets out 10 pillars of infectious disease risk reduction. Below we have summarised elements of this advice which are particularly relevant to equestrian venues.



Contingency planning is essential

Venues should develop plans for how they will deal with horses which arrive showing signs of illness, and for those which develop illness at the venue during a gathering. In the most serious scenarios, this should include cancelling gatherings if there is a high risk of disease within the horses likely to attend or within any horses that are permanent residents at the venue. Venues with permanent residents should also have a plan in place on how they will deal with an infectious disease outbreak amongst this permanent population to ensure that there is no spread to visiting horses. It may be safest, based on best veterinary advice, that events do need to be cancelled or postponed because of

disease outbreaks among permanent residents, especially where there is no obvious and safe contingency plan to safeguard the health of visiting horses.

Keeping a written contingency plan for responding to infectious disease can be invaluable should infectious disease arise. Decisions will have to be enacted very quickly and planning carefully in advance is much easier than making decisions at times of crisis.

The contingency plan should include; a plan for chain of command, set out how horse caretakers will be provided with information, and detail where sick horses can be moved to while they undergo veterinary assessment and initial treatment. Bear in mind it may not be appropriate or acceptable to simply confine a horse arriving with a fever to its transport vehicle or send a sick horse home without any immediate veterinary care. Therefore, especially for large gatherings, consideration should be given to assigning a designated area, referred to as an isolation area, separate from the main stabling area, which can be used to separate horses which arrive at the venue with signs of illness, or develop signs after arrival, while they are assessed and undergo veterinary examination and treatment if appropriate ([see Appendix](#)).

Transparent information sharing is central to effective management of disease outbreaks
It is common that horses incubating and spreading infectious disease are not detected until after they have returned home. It is critical that records are kept of all horses at a venue on any given day and their caretakers' contact details, so that their caretakers can be contacted if infectious disease spread is suspected. To achieve this, venues should work with bodies organising gatherings to ensure that adequate records are kept and responsibility for communication with horse caretakers is decided ahead of an infectious disease incident.

Venues should also require the organisations they work with to give a commitment that participants and horse caretakers are obliged to inform them if they have any reason to believe that any horse is ill while at, or shortly after, a gathering. . This may have significant implications for preventing further spread of infection on other premises to which horses have returned after an event.

Risk reduction strategies

Venues have an important contribution to make in raising infectious disease awareness amongst horse caretakers. Messages which are particularly important for venues to include:

Vaccination reduces risk of illness and helps to reduce infectious disease spread

BEF-EIDAG recommendations for equine vaccination are set out in detail in our advice to MBs. Venues can play a major role in improving vaccination rates amongst the UK's horse population by providing support for local events organisers in checking vaccination requirements are being adhered to and insisting that permanent residents and horses attending unaffiliated classes also adhere to vaccination requirements.

Venues' role in raising awareness of infectious disease

Venues have an important contribution to make in raising infectious disease awareness amongst horse caretakers. The messages which are particularly important for venues to emphasise are summarised in Appendices outlining [preparation for attending gatherings](#) and [behaviours at and after gatherings](#). Venues can raise awareness of infectious disease

risk immediately before any gathering by direct contact with participants, for example via text, facebook messaging etc.

Sick horses and their contacts should not be taken to gatherings

Travelling and working sick horses can exacerbate illness. Sick horses represent a risk to others. However, horses which have been contact with infectious disease recently and are incubating infection may not show external signs of illness. Some horses can be silent carriers of infection without external signs. These cases are known as subclinical infections and affected horses can pose a risk to others. Venues should raise awareness amongst participants and owners that even if their own horse appears well, there is the potential for it to have subclinical infection if there are other infected horses on their yard and it might spread to others if it is brought to a gathering.

Venues should encourage participants and owners to understand the possible detrimental consequences of travelling an apparently healthy horse to an event from premises at which other horses have a potentially infectious disease, either with or without a specific diagnosis.

Venues should require horse owners and riders bringing horses into the venue to declare that their horse is healthy and in particular has not had fever for at least 48 hours prior to entering.

Venues should also bear in mind that horses which are entering their permanent accommodation represent an important potential risk and should require owners of permanent residents to adhere to specific infectious disease-related requirements: our recommendations are detailed in the [Appendices](#). Caretakers of permanent residents should also be made aware that they should alert the venue if they observe signs of illness within horses in this population.

Carefully planned venue facilities, design and layout can reduce risk of disease spread

To protect both groups, there should be no mixing between visiting and permanent resident horses at any times and they should be housed in areas with separate airspaces and walkways. These two groups of horses should not use the exercise facilities at the same time.

Venues should remove or fence off any communal water troughs and troughs which are primarily in place for use by permanent residents and any water source which is used for permanent residents should be labelled in order that caretakers of visiting horses are aware that they should not use it.

Venues should inform participants how to avoid cross contamination between participants and their horses and how to reduce risk to other horses when the return from gatherings. BEF can support venues by providing downloadable signage. For an example of a guide to participant good practice see [Appendices](#)

Venues should provide facilities such as hand sanitising stations, clean water sources, and adequate waste and bedding disposal areas to make it easy for all participants at the gathering to avoid cross contamination.

Dividing stabling areas into small units to reduce shared airspace is an effective tool in reducing risk of infectious disease spread. When visiting horses are staying onsite, venues should ensure there is adequate good quality stabling for all competitors and insist on compulsory cleaning between occupants. BEF-EIDAG encourage venues to take responsibility for stable cleaning rather than rely on visitors because this will make sure it is done to a consistently high standard. Suitable products to use for disinfection of stables include Equizar™, Steri-7 Xtra™, Trigene™ and Virkon S™ and [others approved by DEFRA as listed on the website.](#)

Records of which stables were assigned to which participant should be kept in case potential disease contacts need to be risk assessed and traced.

Practical biosecurity and risk reduction

Specific Actions recommended for venue managers, organisers and officers at horse gatherings if a horse(s) becomes ill

Participants should be obliged to alert organisers and venue owners/managers if a horse at a gathering displays signs consistent with potential infectious disease:

- In most situations, rapid and accurate diagnostic assays will not be practically available during the event to confirm or negate specific infectious diagnoses.
- The sick horse's welfare must be given top priority. As an immediate step, the suspect horse should be moved away from other horses and people, or if this is not feasible, others nearby should be warned to keep their horses away from both the suspect horse and other horses.
 - Clinical needs may be best addressed by returning the horse to its transport or housing within isolation facilities at the gathering.
- The next priority is to arrange for the suspect horse to have prompt veterinary attention. In advance of every gathering, venues should ensure that they have made arrangements with a veterinary practice for a vet to be attend or be on call to be available to attend gatherings if required.
- Decisions on case management and the need for isolation in individual cases of potential infectious disease will be dictated by the most likely cause and severity of clinical signs and should be determined by the attending veterinary surgeon.
- Ideally, and only if deemed fit to travel by the attending veterinary surgeon, the suspect horse should be transported off the premises where the horse gathering is taking place.
 - The suspect horse may be able to return home if it is considered by vets attending it at the venue that it is fit to travel and/or it will be treated more effectively elsewhere.
 - In this scenario, the horse's caretakers must be strongly advised to isolate their horse and arrange for prompt veterinary advice at their home premises as soon as they return home on ongoing care and further investigations.
 - Consideration should be given to arranging for the suspect case to be moved to a facility where it can have any veterinary care it requires and can be isolated until infectious disease is ruled out.
 - The veterinary surgeon present at the gathering should, if possible, make direct contact with the veterinary surgeon(s) who will be taking over the care of the horse after it leaves the gathering to ensure continuity of care and pass on as much medical history as possible.

- It is also very important for the veterinary surgeon present at the gathering to provide the horse's caretaker with brief written notes on any clinical observations, medications given and their own contact details to pass on to the veterinary surgeon(s) who will be taking over the care of the horse after it leaves the gathering to further facilitate continuity of care.
- If the horse is to stay at the gathering and its clinical needs can be adequately met there, it should be isolated from other horses.
 - In this scenario, strict biosecurity measures should be adopted (wearing of gloves, hand washing, changing of clothes, disinfection of feed and water buckets/utensils etc.). Desirable features of an isolation area at a venue are described in the [Appendices](#).
- It may be possible to continue the gathering after the suspect horse(s) have been removed:
 - Any horses that have been in direct contact with the suspect horse, for example due to the sharing of transport, facilities, personnel or equipment etc., should normally be required to leave.
 - There may be circumstances in which the attending vets and organisers are confident that these in contact horses can remain at the gathering without any close contact with other horses.
 - every effort should be made to prevent cross contamination between horses remaining at the gathering (i.e. no sharing of equipment, separate personnel etc.) and strict biosecurity measures should be adopted at all times (hand washing, changing of clothes, disinfection of feed and water buckets/utensils etc.) when separately handling the in-contacts and other horses at the gathering.
- Regardless of whether the gathering is immediately terminated or continues with enhanced biosecurity, if the attending veterinary surgeon considers that other horses at the gathering have potentially been exposed to infectious disease, the venue management team and the MB's local organising committee should work together to ensure that other participants are alerted promptly to explain that they should monitor their own horses closely, keep them separate from others and seek veterinary advice if they see any signs of disease. The MB will be able to support venues in making a risk assessment and determining how extensive contacts and communications should be.

[Advice for venue managers to share with participants at horse gatherings](#)

To reduce risk of infectious disease at horse gatherings, venue owners/managers should make strenuous efforts to ensure that participants in horse gatherings know that they should:

- Bring all necessary equipment with them, including feed, water, feed and water buckets.
- Do not use any water drinking troughs which are labelled for "use by permanent residents only"
- Not share any equipment, particularly tack.
- Prevent direct and indirect contact between horses.
- Minimise use of communal grazing areas.
- Avoid horse-to-horse contact.
- Discourage other people touching their horse and avoid touching horses belonging to others.
- Frequently sanitize their hands, particularly before and after touching horses.

- When stabling away, ensure that stables, feed mangers and water drinkers have been cleaned before being used.
- Bring disinfectants (such as household disinfectant wipes or sprays) to reduce contamination in areas where their horse is stabled.
- Use insect repellent products to reduce flies and other insects around horses and their stables.

Advice for venue managers to share with participants returning home after horse gatherings

To reduce risk of infectious disease after returning home after horse gatherings, venue owners/managers should make strenuous efforts to ensure that participants in horse gatherings know that they should:

- Minimise contact between the returning horse(s) and others on the home property.
 - The ability to isolate horses on equine home premises is critical and is not complex to establish
 - If not already established, everyone should have a plan for how they will do this.
 - Space: creating distance between individuals reduces the risk of disease spread. A few metres are helpful and with increasing distance, risk reduces. For example:
 - Turn returning horses and others out in separate paddocks
 - Assign stabling so that frequent travellers are housed as far as possible from others that do not routinely attend gatherings.
 - Leave empty boxes between horses.
 - Bubbles: creating sub-groups based on age and sports discipline and those attending the same gatherings helps to protect those with less robust immunity and reduce challenges from pathogens that individuals are not encountering regularly:
 - Avoiding mixing adults travelling for competition with foals and youngstock is particularly important.
 - Unvaccinated horses should not be permitted on premises used by horses which attend BEF-MB's gatherings.
 - Manage horses competing in unrelated disciplines separately (for example sports horses should not be housed in close proximity to racehorses; show jumpers should be kept as far as possible from those competing in driving or polocrosse etc).
- Disinfect equipment and boots that were taken to the horse gathering; suitable products include Steri-7 Xtra™, Trigene™ and Virkon S™.
- Disinfect their lorry or trailer, suitable products include Steri-7 Xtra™, Trigene™ and Virkon S™ and others [approved by DEFRA as listed on their website](#).

- Closely monitor horses after attending any gathering, including daily temperature monitoring and recording, ideally for at least two weeks.
 - Fever is defined as a rectal temperature greater than 38.5°C.
 - Many horse owners are not confident about taking their horses temperature, BEF-MB should provide links to resources that support participants in being able to effectively take their horse's temperature such as [BEVA's owner guide](#).
- Contact a veterinary surgeon at the earliest opportunity if the horse shows any signs of illness to arrange clinical assessment, and laboratory tests and for advice on case management.
 - If infectious disease is diagnosed, in addition to [reporting to the BEF-MB](#), participants should also inform transporters and owners/managers of their horse's home premises.

Appendices

Key Messages for participants preparing to attend a gathering

1. Infectious disease can spread when horses gather: horses that are carrying infectious disease may not necessarily show external signs.
2. Check that your horse is healthy before leaving home, do not travel if you have any concerns
3. Make sure your horse has been vaccinated as a minimum for equine influenza and check the venue and BEF-MB's specific vaccination requirements for the gathering
4. Bring everything you will need to minimise contact between your horse and others [at the gathering](#)
5. If required by the venue and/or BEF-MB, submit, or bring, your horse's self-certificate of health to the gathering
6. Inform the gathering organisers immediately if your horse shows any signs of illness [at the gathering](#).

Key messages on how participants can reduce risk of infectious disease at and after equine gatherings

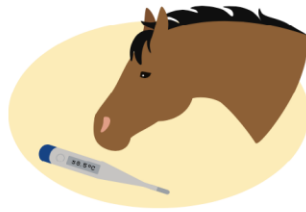


ATTENDING EQUINE EVENTS

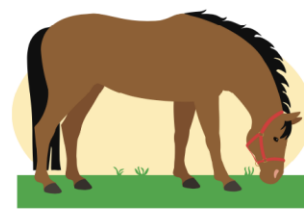
The following advice is designed to help you to reduce the risk, both to your horse and others, of acquiring and spreading equine flu when you're taking part in competitions or other equine events.



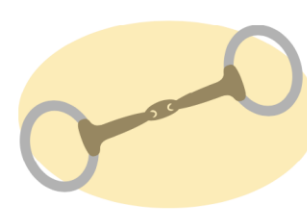
Ensure your horse complies with the current vaccine requirements for your chosen discipline.



If you have any concerns about your horse's health, such as a fever, cough or lethargy, don't travel him.



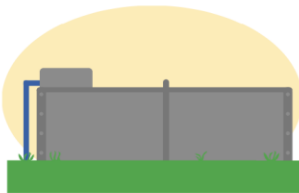
Don't graze your horse at a competition – an infectious horse might have grazed there, too.



Don't share items of tack and equipment, such as bits and bridles, between horses.



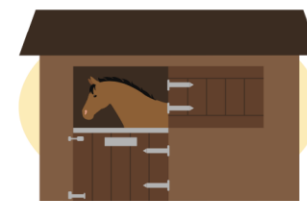
Don't allow your horse to make contact with any other horses, who might pass on diseases.



Don't share water or feed buckets between horses, or use communal water troughs.



Ensure temporary stables are cleaned and disinfected, including mangers and water drinkers, before use.



Isolate your horse upon returning home. Closely monitor him, including twice-daily temperature checks.

IF YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HORSE'S HEALTH, CONTACT YOUR VET

Recommended Wording on infectious disease agreements that venues should require from owners of horses which are permanent residents

The venue owner/managers should insist that horse owners:

- Comply with the venue's requirements for vaccination. BEF-EIDAG recommendations for influenza and equine herpes vaccinations can be found at in [Advice Notes for Member Bodies and Organisers of Equine Gatherings](#).
- Quarantine new arrivals for sufficiently long that recently acquired diseases have become clinically evident: at least 14 days would be suitable for most situations
- Report any confirmed or suspected infectious disease to the venue
- Provide permission for the venue owners/managers to contact vets attending the horse at and after gatherings.

Desirable features of an isolation area at a venue

1. This may be a temporary structure, physically separate from main stabling area by as far as is feasible. The further the better.
2. Individual stables in good repair that can readily be cleaned and disinfected between occupants which requires solid flooring and water-proofed walls
3. Separate airspace from other horses visiting or resident on the property
4. Located in an area which has no through traffic of horses and people
5. Stable cleaning equipment (brushes, wheel barrows etc) dedicated for each stable in this area
6. Unit located and planned such that bedding can readily be disposed of without having to transport contaminated bedding through other areas in which horses and people
7. Clean and readily cleanable water trough in each stable
8. Ideally venue should take responsibility for mucking out and ensure that their staff wear appropriate personal protective clothing (water proof coveralls, boots and gloves)
9. If this is not possible, water proof coveralls, boots and gloves should be provided to horse caretakers using the isolation facility
10. Adequate space for horse caretakers to store at least once day's supply of feed (horse caretakers can be asked to bring in only the amount of feed they need for each day if horses are resident overnight)
11. Foot dips at entry to unit and each stable. The contents should be refreshed at least twice times a day i.e. early in the morning and before evening feeding/mucking out.
12. Disinfectants should be supplied in suitable dilutions within "weed killer" spray available for use by staff and/or horse caretakers
 - Suitable products to use for disinfection of stables and foot dips include Equizar™, Steri-7 Xtra™, Trigene™ and Virkon S™ and [others approved by DEFRA as listed on their website](#)
13. Separate hand wash and equipment sinks.
14. Hand wash sinks should be supplied to disinfectant soap and paper towels
15. Disinfectant wipes should be available for use by staff and/or horse caretakers
 - Products on sale for domestic use to limit spread of COVID are suitable.



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