

Horse Events: Biosecurity guidelines for organizers and competitors

An outbreak of an infectious disease during or subsequent to an equine event has the potential to significantly impact the horse industry through loss of horse health and potentially life, loss of performance ability of individual horses, cancellation of events during disease outbreaks, increased veterinary costs, clean up costs and emotional stress.

The information in this document is intended to serve as a reference for horse owners, event participants and organizers.

This document focuses on disease prevention through biosecurity and vaccination.

What is a horse event? For the purpose of this document a horse event is a gathering of 10 or more horses from three or more properties. A horse event or activity could be a sale, fair, parade, race meet, clinic, competition or any event where horses from multiple farms are commingled.

Horses may be at increased risk for infectious diseases while at events due to the commingling of animals of differing age, health status and many different source farms. As well, stress of competition and transportation has the potential to decrease immunity. Infections of the respiratory tract are the major concern in these situations (e.g. strangles, equine influenza virus, equine rhinitis virus).

All equine event organizers and participants have a responsibility to maintain good biosecurity and not put the health of other horses at risk.

Biosecurity can be thought of as the precautions taken to minimize the risk of introducing infectious disease and also preventing the spread of infection should disease occur.

A sick horse at an event can spread disease to other horses if effective biosecurity is not in place, which can result in a multiplier effect when exposed horses return home. Transmission of infectious diseases can occur via direct contact such as nose-to-nose touching over a stall but also indirectly by people (e.g. contaminated hands or clothing) or equipment (e.g. sharing of feed buckets or tack).

Additional guidelines for handling of situations where infectious disease is suspected or identified can be obtained from your veterinarian. Biosecurity protocols for individual facilities should be developed in coordination with a local veterinarian.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EVENT ORGANIZERS

Event organizers have a duty of care to participants and their horses. They should analyze the potential disease risks and impacts of a disease outbreak at an event and develop a biosecurity strategy to manage and minimize those risks.

Event organizers must make it clear that they expect participants at their events to manage their own biosecurity risks.

For example, event organizers should:

- Organize a veterinarian to be on call
- Appoint a "Horse Health Steward", who understands the biosecurity risks of horses coming together at horse events
- Provide a number to call in an emergency, or an alternative method of communication and ensure all participants are aware of it
- Manage and/or minimize public access to stable areas
- Spread stabling allocation as much as possible to minimize nose to nose contact between horses from different locations
- Create a single point of entry and exit from the grounds
- Provide adequate horse washing facilities
- Provide adequate hand washing facilities
- Provide taps for filling water buckets for horses; if a communal hose must be used post signage to encourage people not to touch the hose end to buckets
- Never use communal water troughs
- Designate an isolation stall that a horse can be moved to should it become ill during an event
- Sanitize stalls between events
- Develop a contingency plan in the event that a stop movement order is put in place.

Event organizers may consider requirements for health certification and/or vaccination (e.g. EIA negative Coggins test). These pre-entry requirements should be broadly communicated to all participants. Participants can be asked to sign a declaration of horse health to assure freedom from clinical disease in their horses within a specific time frame (e.g. 30 days) prior to an event; a declaration to this effect may be required prior to check-in, see Appendix A. See Appendix B for a sample letter to registered exhibitors.

Enforcement of strict biosecurity measures and hygiene practices is likely to be the most effective means of preventing spread of disease during an equine event.

Horse Event Management

It is highly recommended that event organizers collect and retain information on all horses attending the event. The minimum information recommended includes:

- The name, address and telephone number of the owner, custodian or person in charge of the horse
- The premises ID of the location the horse normally resides
- The name and identification of the horse

Event organizers should keep horse event attendance records for a period of six (6) months. These records should be made available to the attending veterinarian upon request.

Premises Identification

The Premises Identification (PID) Program is used to track the location of animals in case of a health emergency occurrence, a public health emergency or an emergency such as a natural disaster affecting animals and people. In 2009, regulations requiring premises identification became law in Alberta as part of the provincial Animal Health Act.

If you keep horses on your property or operate a “commingling site” you must register your premises. Visit www.albertaequestrian.com/Industry-Premises-ID-Equine-Traceability for more information on the program. If you keep your horse at a boarding or other property you should be aware of the PID number of that property.

HORSE OWNER RESPONSIBILITIES

The primary responsibility for biosecurity at events lies with horse owners, custodians and riders. Horse owners and custodians should inquire in advance about specific protocols that the event organizers may have in place and be prepared to adhere to those.

Horses that are suspected of suffering from an infectious or contagious disease or have been in contact with other animals suffering from such disease **MUST NOT** be brought to horse events.

Owners and those providing boarding should have biosecurity plans for each property where horses are kept. For details on completing a biosecurity risk assessment and setting up a biosecurity plan visit: www.albertaequestrian.com/Biosecurity.

Basic Principles

- Minimize the risk of disease by planning to avoid introduction to new horses, prior to leaving for an event
- Maintain current vaccinations on all horses
- Observe good hygiene around horses especially after handling other people’s horses
- Wash hands with soap and water, or use disinfectant hand solution after handling horses, especially after contact with the mouth or nose

- Consciously monitor your horse’s health; especially in the 3-5 days leading up to and following an event
 - Check horses are eating and drinking normally
 - Check for any change in behavior
 - Check for any unusual nasal discharge
 - Check for any coughing
 - Check for any signs of discomfort or unusual stance or weight shifting
 - Check for any signs of swelling or lameness
 - Check your horse’s temperature for 3 days before and following an event (a horse’s normal temperature at rest is between 37 and 38.5 degrees Celsius)
- Wash your horse and horse trailer prior to departing
- Assemble and carry a mobile biosecurity kit including disinfectant

At the event:

- Check your horse’s temperature twice a day
- Do not share feed or water containers
- Do not use communal water troughs
- Only share cleaned and disinfected tack and equipment (e.g. bits)
- If stabling is not assigned and is not full, leave an empty stall between your horses and those from other locations
- Sanitize your assigned stall prior to bringing your horse in
- If stables are full, assess the risk from nose to nose contact with horses from other locations, and consider placing tarps or other physical barriers to prevent contact
- If your horse develops a fever or signs of illness contact a veterinarian and event official immediately

EXAMPLES OF INFECTIOUS HORSE DISEASES

Colds/Flu/Respiratory Diseases

These are viral diseases caused by common viruses like Equine Herpes Virus, Equine Rhinitis Virus, Equine Adenovirus, and Equine Arteritis Virus. These diseases are common among young horses especially when they are first mixed or exposed to other horses. While they mostly have a low impact on the horse’s long term health they may cause considerable inconvenience and cost by interrupting training and showing as well as veterinary care. Complications can occur if horses are put back into work too soon after such an infection.

Strangles

This is a contagious, upper respiratory tract bacterial infection. Cases are identified each year in Alberta including significant horse health impact as well as deaths. Recovery and treatment are often prolonged. A vaccine is available, but not appropriate for all horses (contact your veterinarian).

Other infectious equine diseases can be spread during events such as ringworm, diarrheal diseases and equine infectious anemia.

VACCINATION & TESTING REQUIREMENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EQUINE EVENTS

It is highly recommended that all horses participating in equine events be fully vaccinated for both Equine Influenza Virus (EIV) and Equine Herpes Virus (1&4) (EHV).

It is important to remember that vaccination is only part of an infectious disease prevention program and cannot make up for lack of effective biosecurity. Vaccination will not prevent all cases of disease with either EIV or EHV and vaccination is not known to result in protection against the neurological form of equine herpes virus (nEHV-1). However, vaccination is thought to reduce the amount of viral shedding in infected horses, which can decrease the potential for further spread.

It is also recommended that all horses participating in equine events be tested for Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) with negative results reported within the past six (6) months. EIA is an infectious and potentially fatal viral disease affecting the immune system of horses, donkeys and mules. Most EIA-infected horses show no clinical signs of disease; however, they remain carriers of the virus for life and can be a source of infection for susceptible animals.

In Canada, EIA is listed as a reportable disease under the Health of Animals Act. Accordingly, when EIA is suspected, it must be reported to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA).

It is the responsibility of all horse owners and custodians attending events in Alberta or beyond to be aware of criteria required by the venue, province/state of destination.

Reference: Infectious disease control – recommendations for biosecurity and vaccination By Katharina L. Lohmann (WCVM), University of Saskatchewan (March 2008) http://cms.abvma.ca/uploads/WCVM_INFECTIOUS_DISEASE_CONTROL.pdf

RESOURCES & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

AEF Biosecurity Outreach: Plan, Protect and Prevent - www.albertaequestrian.com/Biosecurity

Alberta Veterinary Medical Association: Biosecurity - www.abvma.ca/Biosecurity/About-Biosecurity.asp

Canadian Food Inspection Agency: Equine Infectious Anemia - <http://inspection.gc.ca/animals/terrestrial-animals/diseases/reportable/eia/eng/1329698749489/1329703176989>

University of Guelph - http://www.equineguelph.ca/Tools/biosecurity_2011.php

California Department of Food and Agriculture: Biosecurity Toolkit for Equine Events - www.cdffa.ca.gov/ahfss/Animal_Health/Equine_Biosecurity.html

University of California Davis: general information on EHV-1 - www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/ceh/ehv1_general.cfm

American Association of Equine Practitioners: Information for Horse Owners - www.aaep.org/

APPENDIX A: HORSE EVENT PARTICIPATION DECLARATION

Event Name: _____

Event Location: _____

Event Date(s): _____

CONTACT PERSON

Name of Person in Charge of Horse(s) at the Event: _____

Address: _____

Home Phone Number: _____

Cell Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Truck License Plate #: _____

Horses Attending Event

Name of Horse	Breed	Age	Sex	Identification (color, markings, brand)	Stall Location

Address of property from which the horse was moved to the event: _____

Address of property to which the horse will move after the event: (If different from above) _____

Alternate Contact Information: (For other individuals affiliated with named horses)

Name _____ Cell Phone # _____

Name _____ Cell Phone # _____

HORSE HEALTH DECLARATION

I, _____ declare that the horse(s) named above has/have been in good health, with body temperature(s) below 39°C (102°F), eating normally and has/have not shown signs of infectious disease for the three (3) days preceding arrival at this event including transport.

Signature _____ Date _____

(Complete a separate form for different owners.)

For office Use only:

Date and Time of Arrival _____ Event Official Initials _____

Date and Time of Departure _____ Event Official Initials _____

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE LETTER TO MAIL TO REGISTERED EXHIBITORS

Dear Exhibitor,

We have received your registration for _____ (event name) on _____ (event date). Protecting the health of your horse and other horses at this event is of the utmost importance to event management. This event is implementing biosecurity measures to ensure infectious disease agents are not introduced or spread at this event.

Regardless of whether they are participating in the event or not, all horses and livestock that enter the grounds will be subject to examination by event officials/designated representatives and/or provincial or federal animal health officials. Such examinations are to determine if the animal(s) is/are, has/have been infected/exposed, or are likely to be infected with, an infectious or contagious disease. If after such examination, an official believes the health condition of an animal will place other animals at risk, the officials may quarantine the animal(s) and others that may have been infected/exposed, or, if necessary, require movement of the animal(s) from the event premises. All participants must agree to fully cooperate with examining officials and abide by their decisions/instructions. Failure to comply with officials shall be grounds for immediate expulsion of the participant from the grounds and potential disciplinary action(s) by the sponsoring organization and local/state or federal officials.

The equine health entry requirements for this event include: (EVENT MANAGER MAY CHOOSE ONE or MORE and DELETE OTHERS)

- a. Horses displaying obvious signs of clinical disease, such as fever, abnormal nasal discharge, consistent frequent coughing, neurologic signs of ataxia or significant hind limb weakness are not permitted to enter the event grounds.
- b. Event No Fever Policy:
 - i. Each horse entering the premises must have documentation demonstrating a record of body temperature readings with none above 39°C (102°F) for a designated time period before arrival at the event premises. (For example, 72 hours)
 - ii. Show officials will obtain a body temperature of all horses at the time of arrival to the event premises and all horses will be subject to periodic inspection by event officials during the event.
 - iii. Horse owner/custodians will monitor and document on a log the body temperature of their horse(s) ____ times a day during the event.
- c. Health Certification Policy
 - i. Horse owner/custodians must present to event officials at the time of arrival to the event premises, a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (health certificate), written within ____ hours (i.e., seventy-two (72) hours) of arrival to the event premises.
- d. Event Participation Declaration: (See Appendix A for Sample Event Participation Declaration)
 - i. Horse owner/custodians must sign a health certification statement verifying that the horse(s) has/have been healthy with no sign of infectious disease for the preceding five (5) days and a body temperature below 39°C (102°F) during the ____ hours (i.e., 72 hours) before arrival at the event premises.
 - ii. Horse owner/custodians must provide event officials with the address of the premises where each horse was located immediately before arrival at the event and the address of the intended premises of destination for each horse following departure from the event premises.

In addition to the above entry requirement, the following biosecurity measures are recommended:

- Dogs are not permitted on the event premises or All dogs on the event premises must be kept on a leash
- Limit horse-to-horse contact
- Limit horse-to-human-to-horse contact
- Avoid sharing of equipment, to include tack, water buckets, brushes, etc.
- Avoid use of communal water troughs
- Avoid submerging end of water hoses in water buckets
- Do not allow horses to drink directly from a water hose

- Avoid tying horses to fences or gates near the competition area
- Cover all feed and hay to prevent access by vermin, birds or other animals
- Monitor your horse frequently for signs of disease during the event
- Immediately report any sick horse(s) to show management
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect all equipment before use at the home premises
- Isolate and monitor all animals upon return to the home premises.

In the event of an emergency or infectious disease incident at the event, all participants and horses will remain at the event venue until management provides clearance for departure from the premises. If an infectious disease is identified event officials will evaluate individual horse disease exposure risk and provide horse owner/custodians with follow up disease monitoring instructions. If movement restrictions are put in place, each horse owner/custodian is responsible for the care and maintenance of their respective horse(s) on the premises.

We appreciate your compliance with event management efforts to maintain biosecurity and the health of our horses at the upcoming event.

Sincerely,

(signed)

Event Manager