**INTRODUCTION**

This Code of Practice outlines procedures that should be followed by riding schools in conjunction with their veterinary surgeons should an outbreak of infectious disease occur in a yard.

Biocontainment describes the measures that should be taken to reduce the spread of a disease within or between premises once an infection has been identified.

The goal is to prevent further transmission of the infection to other premises and to other horses.

These Guidelines on Biosecurity outline the general steps you need to have in place to reduce the risk of disease - Prevention being much better and cheaper than Cure!!

This Code is not intended to cover all aspects of diagnosis and management of these conditions, as that is the remit of your own veterinary surgeon, but rather to provide an initial reference site with broad guidelines that if followed, will minimise the risk of infectious disease spreading within a yard or to other groups of horses in the centre, or at events.

The overall purpose of the code is to protect from infectious disease and it is therefore in everyone's interest to follow these guidelines.

It also contains information on the compulsory reporting of some diseases to the BHA (Director of Science and Welfare) and others that are 'Notifiable', where any suspected cases must be reported to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) via the local office of Animal Health.

Included in this code is information on International infectious diseases (known as ‘Exotic’ diseases) that, at present, are not found in the UK, but some are brought in with imported horses on occasions such as

Equine Viral Arteritis (EVA) and Equine Infectious Anaemia (EIA or Swamp Fever) and some diseases, such as West Nile Virus and African Horse Sickness are thought by the authorities to be very likely to be seen in the UK at some point in the near future.

**GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

If an outbreak of infectious disease occurs or is suspected in a training yard, the trainer and attending veterinary surgeon should investigate the cause of the problem as follows:-

Take appropriate samples for micro-organism investigation (viral, bacterial and fungal);

Inform the laboratory so that it is prepared for the arrival of the samples and can advise on the need for further sampling;

Implement immediate Biosecurity and Biocontainment practices to minimise the risk of infection spreading to unaffected horses;

For suspected notifiable disease; www.defra.gov.uk/food-farm/animals/diseases contact local Defra Animal Health Office: www.defra.gov.uk/animalhealth/about/contact-us/index

**BIOSECURITY GUIDELINES**

The threats from disease are ever present in the equine industry and countering them requires constant vigilance at all levels.

The term Biosecurity refers to the management practices and procedures that can markedly reduce the risk of infectious disease outbreaks.

Biosecurity measures are designed to reduce the likelihood of introduction of a disease on to an individual establishment, a region or indeed a country.

Biosecurity is thus about reducing the risk of disease and its impact on your business and the health and welfare of your horses.

Biosecurity measures are often not specific to a particular disease or single infectious agent, rather they are a collection of measures that should be useful for the prevention of most infectious agents of concern, with some additional specific biosecurity measures for certain individual infectious agents.

These Guidelines on Biosecurity outline the general steps you should take to reduce the risk of disease entering your premises.

**HOW DISEASES ARE SPREAD**

Equine infectious diseases are spread in various ways:

Direct contact

Aerosol spread via droplets from coughs and sneezes

Contaminated inanimate objects

Feed and water

Vectors: (disease carried by an insect, an animal or a human)

Soiled bedding, urine and faeces

Medical equipment (especially if invasive- e.g., hypodermic needles etc)

Vehicles As a consequence the key elements of Biosecurity can be grouped as:-

1. Management of the horse population (resident, returning from show, or events as well as new arrivals);
2. Management of personnel (both staff and visitors)
3. Management of the environment at the premises

**Management of the Horse Population**

Key practices of managing the horse population include ascertaining the health status of new arrivals and returning horses.

The most common way for an equine infectious disease to be spread in horses is when a new horse arrives at a yard carrying an infectious disease.

Train staff to spot sick horses and report them immediately.

Ideally new arrivals should be isolated from current residents for 4 weeks

A separate quarantine unit for housing new arrivals is the best way to limit transmission of any infectious disease.

This unit can also be used to separate a sick horse from the healthy remainder of the yard, or for certain diseases, the sick horse and its immediate in-contacts.

The isolation stables need to be separate with no shared air space.

The isolation unit should be downwind of the main stable unit with respect to the common prevailing weather.

Insect vectors can be limited by using screens over doors and windows and using insecticidal sprays.

New horses kept in isolation should be checked daily by a competent member of staff, with respect to its general health including monitoring its temperature, and its food and water intake.

Separate stable yard equipment, buckets, grooming kit and tack should be used for new horses and ideally should be marked in some way with coloured tape or permanent markers.

Horses returning from overnight shows should be carefully observed on their return and isolated rapidly if there is any concern for their health.

Ensure all horses are appropriately vaccinated.

**Management of Staff and Visitors**

Staff should be trained in everyday good hygiene practices, especially effective hand washing and disinfecting of items, and their use of these practices should be monitored.

Assign specific members of staff to care for the exposed/affected/sick horses, and separate staff to look after the healthy horses.

Disposable gloves, barrier clothing and disposable boot covers should be used when working with sick horses, and after use be disposed of or laundered and disinfected.

The isolation/quarantine unit should have a changing area for the staff, so that clothing and footwear worn in the restricted area are not worn elsewhere.

If it is unavoidable that an individual has to care for both groups of affected and unaffected horses, then the care of healthy animals (feeding/ watering/ grooming/ mucking out and exercising) should be carried out first, exposed animals next and affected horses last, followed by decontamination.

Visitors:

Use only one entrance/exit to the premises and mark it appropriately, all others should be closed off. It should be designed so that access can be restricted and drive over disinfectant mats or baths can be installed when required.

Parking should be away from the horses to help prevent disease-carrying organisms being spread by shoes or tyres to the stable area.

If individual vehicles are needed close eg the farrier or veterinary surgeon during a period of high risk, their tyres can be sprayed with disinfectant and they can use a footbath.

Visitors should ideally wear clothes and shoes that have not been worn on any other equine premises.

Records of visitors to the premises with date, time, name and purpose of visit should be kept.

Non-essential access should be limited during any outbreak and a record kept of any horse that the visitor came into contact with.

**Management of the Environment**

When a disease is present in a yard, manure and bedding are a source of infectious agents, not just those excreted in the droppings, but they can carry all infectious agents.

So soiled bedding on wheelbarrow or tractor tyres can spread disease if not routinely cleaned and disinfected.

Soiled bedding material from the stables of affected horses must be placed in enclosed containers for incineration and not onto open air muck heaps.

Horse specific equipment (feed buckets, water buckets, head collars etc) should be clearly marked as belonging to an individual horse and is to only be used on that horse.

Any shared equipment (lead ropes, bits/bridles, twitches, thermometers grooming kits etc) should be cleaned of organic debris and disinfected between horses.

Equipment that cannot be properly disinfected (sponges, brushes etc) should not be shared between horses, separate labelled ones should be provided.

All equipment should regularly be thoroughly scrubbed and cleaned with a detergent and water, rinsed, disinfected and rinsed once more.

Cleaning and disinfection should be carried out in an area with a solid surface and appropriate drain, with minimal walk through and traffic flow that can itself be cleaned and disinfected at the end of the session.

Cloth items (stable rubbers, towels, bandages etc) should be laundered and thoroughly dried between each use. To kill ringworm spores it will be necessary to add a disinfectant to the rinse (eg Virkon)

Ointments and other topical medications should be dispensed from larger containers into smaller containers for individual use.

Rodents, bird and insect control should be evaluated, especially around the isolation unit. Repellent insecticides and insect-proof screens should be available for use when required.

Dogs and cats can spread disease and the risk from their presence should be evaluated and they should be kept away from the isolation stabling.

Eliminate the use of any communal water sources. Instruct staff not to submerge the hose when filling buckets.

When using disinfectants, always follow the instructions on the label. Select a Defra approved disinfectant that has documented effectiveness in the presence of 10% organic matter, works in the water hardness of the locale and is safe to use in the environment of horses and humans.

Stables, mangers and yards should be kept clean, free of standing water, regularly and thoroughly scrubbed with an appropriate detergent/disinfectant and allowed to dry.

Take care when using a pressure washer, as those set at >120psi (greater than 120psi) can produce aerosols that spread infectious agents in the air.

**BIOSECURITY MADE SIMPLE**

To safeguard the horse population within your training establishment take the following basic steps;-

Train all staff in disease prevention, identification and hygiene procedures. The following are a set of vital signs for the normal healthy horse and appropriate examinations for general health:-

Temperature 36.5-38.5C

Breathing rate 8-15 breaths/min

Heart rate 25-45 beats/min

Capillary refill time (in gums) - 1-2secs

Look for eye or nose discharges

Observe how the horse is standing

Check for consistency and number of droppings

Check consumption from water buckets and feed bowl

Assess horse’s general demeanour.

Keep good records and REPORT any abnormalities from the above.

Take rectal temperatures twice daily, it is a very good indicator of disease.

Isolate new arrivals for a period of 10 days or introduce horses from properties with a known high health status only.

Isolate and pay particular attention to horses from sales complexes, from unknown mixed population yards and those that have used commercial horse transport servicing mixed populations.

Verify the vaccine status of new arrivals.

Control rodents and keep feed in rodent-proof containers.

It is helpful to regularly clean and disinfect stables between inmates and also to clean and disinfect equipment and horse transport between horses. Remember to remove as much organic material as possible before disinfection.

Isolate horses at the first sign of sickness until an infectious or contagious disease has been ruled out.

Contact your veterinary surgeon if any of your horses show clinical signs of sickness.

Do not move sick horses except for isolation, veterinary treatment or under veterinary supervision. Attend to sick horses last (i.e., feed, water and treat) or use separate staff.

Provide hand washing facilities and hand disinfection gel for staff handling groups of horses and provide separate protective clothing and footwear for handling and treating sick horses.

Keep records of horse movements so that contacts can be traced in the event of a disease outbreak.

Maintain good perimeter security for your premises and maintain controlled access for vehicles and visitors.

**BIOCONTAINMENT GUIDELINES**

Biosecurity measures to prevent infectious disease from entering a premises are very similar to the Biocontainment practices necessary to stop infectious disease from spreading within those premises and ‘escaping’ from it.

Affected horses should be prevented any contact with other horses.

As part of the movement restrictions, post restricted access signs to all perimeter entrance points to the premises, closing off all but the main entrance where the use of disinfectant mats should be implemented.

Footbaths and hand sanitizers (62% alcohol gel) should be placed at the main entrance and other access points within the premises, e.g., between barns or other groups of stables.

All other species of animals such as dogs and yard cats should be excluded from the premises.

Soiled bedding material from stables of affected horses must be placed in enclosed containers for incineration and not put on open air muck heaps.

Rodent, bird and insect control should be implemented especially around the isolation unit.

Repellent insecticides and insect-proof screens should be used if appropriate, around the isolation stables.

Non-essential access should be limited during any outbreak and a record of all visitors kept including the horses that they have contact with.

Assign specific members of staff to care for any exposed/affected sick horses and separate staff to look after healthy horses.

Ensure that staff understand hygiene principles and thereby do not pass diseases to horses at other premises.

The isolation/quarantine unit should have a changing area for staff so that clothing and footwear worn in the restricted area are not worn elsewhere.

Barrier clothing, waterproof footwear and disposable gloves should be used when working with sick and in-contact horses and after use they should be disposed of or laundered and disinfected. x Eliminate the use of communal water sources. Instruct staff not to submerge the hose when filling water buckets.

When using disinfectants, always follow the instructions on the label. Select a Defra approved disinfectant and chose from the general order disinfectants that have documented effectiveness in the presence of 10% organic matter, works in the water hardness of the locale and is safe to use in the environment of horses and people.

Horse specific equipment (feed and water buckets, head collars etc) should be clearly marked as belonging to an individual horse and is to be used only on that horse.

**TRANSPORT BIOSECURITY**

There is significant potential for transmission of infectious disease during transport.

Cleanliness and hygiene on board all forms of transport is the responsibility of the vehicle owner in private transport and the vehicle operator in contracted transport.

The following notes are for guidance in either case.

1. Vehicles should be cleaned and disinfected frequently and regularly, using approved disinfectants capable of killing bacteria and viruses.
2. Vehicles should be cleaned before horses are loaded.
3. Prior vaccination of horses may reduce the risk of disease transmission during transport. Ideally these should be booster vaccinations but, if horses have not been previously vaccinated, then sufficient time should be allowed before transport for both primary and secondary vaccinations to produce adequate immunity.
4. When mixed loads) are unavoidable, give careful consideration to the categories of horses that are transported together so as to minimise the disease risk (your veterinary surgeon can advise).
5. Horses should only travel if they are considered fit to do so by a veterinary surgeon.
6. Sick animals should not be transported except when they are travelling to obtain veterinary treatment. If transport of such horses is unavoidable they must not be put in mixed loads without the consent of other owners (or those authorised to act on their behalf) of the horses in that load. Veterinary advice should be taken.
7. If horses or their in-contacts are ill on or shortly after arrival at their destination, veterinary advice should be sought and the sick horses isolated if necessary. The transport operator should be informed at once and should then inform other clients with arrivals in the same load.
8. Facilities should, if necessary, be made available for

**CONTACT INFORMATION FOR REPORTING NOTIFIABLE DISEASE SUSPECTS TO ANIMAL HEALTH OFFICES IN ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND WALES**

There are statutory requirements that suspicion of the notifiable diseases of

EVA,

EIA,

African Horse Sickness,

West Nile Fever

Equine Piroplasmosis

**must be reported immediately to the** appropriate Divisional Veterinary Manager (DVM) of Defra.

DVM’s are based at Animal Health Offices as listed below.

When you telephone your local Animal Health Office, tell the switchboard that you are telephoning to report a suspect case of notifiable disease and ask to speak to the Duty Vet.

The Duty Vet is trained to handle reports of notifiable disease and will discuss the case with you.

Many reports can be ruled out based on information gathered during this initial telephone conversation.

However if a notifiable disease cannot be ruled out, the Duty Vet will arrange for a Veterinary Officer to visit the premises, usually within two hours.

If considered to be appropriate, restrictions preventing movements on and off the premises may be served verbally over the phone at this time. When the Veterinary officer visits, they will examine the affected animal, together with the other animals on the premises.

Disease is often ruled out at this point and restrictions are lifted immediately.

If disease cannot be ruled out by this examination and inquiry, then samples may be taken and sent to a laboratory for testing. In this case, restrictions will remain in place until negative laboratory results are obtained - this is often less than 24 hours. If negative results are obtained then restrictions are lifted immediately.

South East Region Reigate, South East Animal Health Regional Office   
 01737 242242 www.animalhealth.defra.gov.uk/about/contact-us/southeast.html Reading Animal Health Office   
 01189 596695 Regional Office covers: Brighton and Hove / East Sussex / Greater London Authority Kent Medway / Surrey / West Sussex