



RESPONSIBLE  
HORSE OWNER BOOKLET

# INFECTIOUS DISEASE & VACCINATION



MSD  
Animal Health



# INTRODUCTION



**Equine infectious disease can severely affect a horse's health and performance and in some cases prove fatal.**

**As in humans, prevention is better than cure and vaccination is a key element in the fight against infectious disease. Vaccination helps horses fight infection and if a horse does develop disease, it will decrease the severity of signs. Vaccination is most effective when a high percentage of the population is vaccinated (known as herd immunity).**

This guide is part of a series covering a range of different topics to help you keep your horses healthy.

For more information and to gain access to the rest of the series, please visit our website:

[www.healthyhorses.co.uk](http://www.healthyhorses.co.uk)

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# UK INFECTIOUS DISEASE THREATS

	FLU	STRANGLES	HERPES	TETANUS
Incubation (days)	1 – 3	7 – 14	Variable	7 – 21
Transmission (direct - horse to horse contact) (indirect - e.g. via equipment and people)	Direct & indirect	Direct & indirect	Direct & indirect	Enters via wounds
Respiratory signs (cough, nasal discharge)	✓	✓	✓	✗
Raised temperature	✓	✓	✓	✓ (variable)
Muscle soreness	✓	✗	✓	✓
Reduced appetite	✓	✓	✓	✓ (unable to eat - 'lock jaw')
weakness/unable to stand	✗	✗	✓	✗
Abortion	✗	✗	✓	✗
Rocking horse stance, seizures	✗	✗	✗	✓
Carrier	✗	✓	✓ (Latency)	✗
Extended recovery	✓	✓	✓	✓ (mild cases only)
Death	Unlikely	Possible	Possible	Likely
Specific Treatment	✗	✗	✗	✗
Supportive treatment	✓	✓	✓	✓
Prevention	Vaccination	Vaccination	Vaccination	Vaccination

# EXOTIC DISEASES

**Exotic diseases are potentially serious diseases that are not currently found in the UK.**

They are often spread by midges and mosquitoes which mean the diseases are particularly difficult to manage should there be an outbreak. The risk of these diseases entering the UK is related to climate change providing a suitable environment for these insects to survive.

There are 3 main disease concerns:

- **West Nile Virus**
- **African Horse Sickness**
- **Equine Infectious Anaemia (swamp fever)**

**These diseases are classified as 'notifiable'. Notifiable diseases are animal diseases that you're legally obliged to report to the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), even if you only suspect that an animal may be affected.**

**For more information regarding these diseases and other potential threats see:**

[www.gov.uk/government/collections/notifiable-diseases-in-animals](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/notifiable-diseases-in-animals)

[www.beva.org.uk/aboutus/Committees/healthandmedicinescommittee/exoticdisease](http://www.beva.org.uk/aboutus/Committees/healthandmedicinescommittee/exoticdisease)



# BIOSECURITY

The principles of disease control focus on good yard management to keep the disease out and improving the immunity of individuals and the herd through vaccination.

## Follow good hygiene procedures:

- Use dedicated stable and grooming equipment, tack and rugs for each horse
- Avoid horse to horse contact with unknown horses at shows or events
- Do not share water at shows or events
- Clean and disinfect stables and equipment between horse usage with disinfectants which will kill viruses and bacteria

## Isolation:

- Isolate new arrivals for at least 14-21 days
- Isolation areas can be as simple as an isolated paddock or stable but should ideally be at least 10 metres from other horses

## Establish a yard protocol:

- What to do in the event of a horse displaying signs of an infectious disease
- For dealing with new arrivals to the yard including isolation and vaccination requirements
- This should apply to all horses on the yard

## Limit the number of horses on a yard:

- Don't overcrowd, it encourages disease

## Be vigilant for signs:

- Early identification of potential disease enables swift treatment and reduces the chance of infection spreading
- Monitoring for a rise in rectal temperature is a good way of picking up early cases of respiratory disease

## Be aware of horses at risk:

- Young horses, those kept in large groups and those which travel a lot are more susceptible

## Segregate youngsters:

- Diseases such as 'flu' and 'strangles' are most common in youngsters

## Ventilation:

- Ensuring stables are well ventilated will improve respiratory health and help reduce the spread of disease

## Maintain buildings, fencing and yard areas:

- Minimise the risk of injury by keeping areas tidy and by removing all potentially harmful materials

For more information on biosecurity and disease prevention see:

<http://www.worldhorsewelfare.org/Disease-prevention>

[www.healthyhorses.co.uk](http://www.healthyhorses.co.uk)

# VACCINATION



## Why should I vaccinate my horse?

- To prevent unnecessary suffering
- To prevent additional unplanned expenses – costs of treatment can far outweigh costs of vaccination
- To prevent loss of use – a sick horse should not be ridden or exercised until it has completely recovered
- To prevent yard closures and sporting cancellations – horse movements on a yard may have to be restricted or cancelled if a horse is diagnosed with an infectious disease
- To prevent the spread of disease

## What does vaccination achieve?

- Vaccination is the best way to protect your horse and others around it from infectious and contagious diseases
- Your horse is part of a herd whether this is their field companion, the other horses on the yard or even the other horses in your local area
- Vaccinating enough horses promotes the concept of herd immunity. If enough horses are vaccinated the disease is unable to spread because there are too few susceptible horses left to propagate the outbreak



# WHAT IS HERD IMMUNITY?



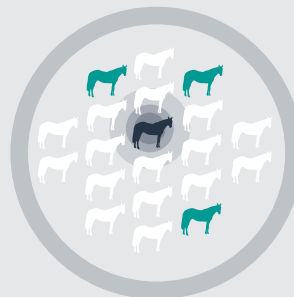
**Herd immunity is a form of immunity that occurs when the vaccination of a significant portion of a herd provides a measure of protection for individuals who have not been vaccinated or not developed immunity through natural exposure.**

When a high percentage of the population is protected through vaccination it is difficult for the disease to spread as there are too few susceptible animals to propagate the outbreak.

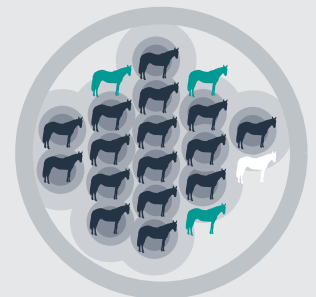
In Britain it is estimated that less than 50% of horses are vaccinated against 'flu'. \* It is widely agreed that to achieve an effective level of herd immunity against equine 'flu', vaccination rates need to be considerably higher and we have set an aspirational target of 70%.

## SAFETY IN NUMBERS

-  Healthy horse, non-vaccinated
-  Healthy horse, vaccinated
-  Non-vaccinated, sick, contagious



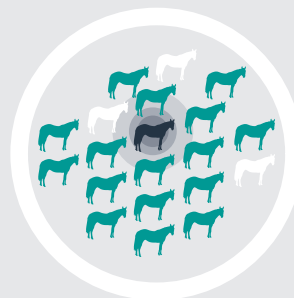
SOME horses are vaccinated...



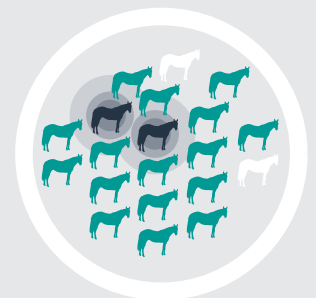
virus spreads



**By protecting your horse you are helping to protect all horses by reducing the spread of disease.**



MOST horses are vaccinated...



virus contained

\*Vaccination rates are based on the assumption of 1 million horses in GB. Vaccine doses based on GFK Oct 2013 MAT



# WHAT SHOULD I DO NOW?

## Check your horses vaccination status.

### Ask yourself:

- Is my horse at risk of disease?
- Is my horse putting other horses at risk of disease?

Discuss a suitable vaccination protocol with your vet.

Discuss yard protocols for new arrivals and what to do in the event of a possible disease outbreak with the yard manager.

## Where can I go for further information?

Your vet will be able to provide further information relating to infectious disease and vaccination.

- [www.healthyhorses.co.uk](http://www.healthyhorses.co.uk)
- [www.worldhorsewelfare.org/disease-prevention](http://www.worldhorsewelfare.org/disease-prevention)
- [www.gov.uk/government/collections/notifiable-diseases-in-animals](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/notifiable-diseases-in-animals)
- [www.beva.org.uk/aboutus/committees/healthandmedicinescommittee/exoticdisease](http://www.beva.org.uk/aboutus/committees/healthandmedicinescommittee/exoticdisease)





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**Further information  
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[www.msd-animal-health.co.uk](http://www.msd-animal-health.co.uk)  
[www.healthyhorses.co.uk](http://www.healthyhorses.co.uk)

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