

## Biosecurity Do's and Don'ts

Use these disease prevention strategies on the farm, at the horse show, and in the breeding shed

**B**y now you're probably familiar with general biosecurity rules: Vaccinate your herd, isolate sick horses, disinfect equipment between uses. But not all disease prevention practices are made equal. How you protect your field of retirees or your breeding stallion from disease differs from what you do when you haul your riding horse to a combined event.

Three veterinarians passionate about preventing infectious disease spread among horses have shared their best biosecurity suggestions for three scenarios: on the farm, at a horse show, and in the breeding shed. With each instance, we'll show you exactly what good biosecurity looks like.

### On the Farm

Stephanie Brault, DVM, PhD, Dipl. ACVIM, is a postdoctoral fellow in veterinary epidemiology and house officer in infection control and biosecurity at Colorado State University's Veterinary Teaching Hospital, in Fort Collins. She's helped the American Association of Equine Practitioners develop and revise its biosecurity guidelines. Here are her tips for smart everyday biosecurity on the farm.

- **Do** keep horses in segregated groups of the same use or life stage. For example, horses that travel off the premises frequently for shows should be kept separately from nontraveling resident horses or broodmares, says Brault.
- **Don't** let horses touch noses in the

barn or over fencelines. However, if horses are residents, segregated into use groups, and have not been off the property, this step isn't usually necessary, says Brault.

- **Don't** allow horses to share water sources.
- **Don't** share grooming supplies, tack (such as bits), and equipment.
- **Do** wash hands between handling horses, if possible. Again, if your home herd hasn't been off the property, this might not be needed, says Brault.
- **Do** be sure your horse gets all core and risk-based vaccines.
- **Do** know how to take your horse's temperature and what his baseline is.
- **Do** ask farriers, trainers, veterinarians,



Group horses based on their use or life stage. Designate separate water sources for these groups; wash your hands between handling horses; wash and dry towels and pads between uses; practice rodent, insect, and bird control to deter residents such as these; and don't allow horses onto the premises without a valid, up-to-date negative Coggins.

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: ISTOCK.COM, THE HORSE STAFF, KEVIN THOMPSON/THE HORSE

## FARM&BARN

and visitors to wash their hands before entering the barn.

- **Do** wash and dry saddle cloths, towels, bandages, halter fleeces, and wipe rags between uses.
- **Don't** use multiple-dose medications (oral pastes, ophthalmic ointments, topicals) on multiple horses.
- **Do** institute rodent, bird, and insect control practices.
- **Do** have on hand contact info for the State Department of Agriculture Veterinarian, USDA Area-Veterinarian-In-Charge, and area practicing veterinarians in case of an outbreak.
- **Don't** allow horses onto the property without a health certificate and Coggins, plus proof of required vaccinations. Isolate new arrivals from resident horses for at least two weeks, and monitor them for signs of illness, checking temperatures twice daily, Brault says.
- **Do** monitor horses that travel off the premises for signs of illness for two weeks after their return—again, checking temperatures twice daily. Try to handle these horses last each chore session (after the nontraveling resident horses) in case they are incubating an illness, and wash your hands after contacting them, she says.
- **Do** isolate sick or febrile horses immediately, and call the veterinarian.

### At Horse Shows

Katie Flynn, BVMS, MRCVS, equine staff veterinarian with the California Department of Food and Agriculture, has done extensive work monitoring and communicating about infectious disease outbreaks and helped create the Biosecurity Toolkit for Equine Events ([cdfa.ca.gov/ahfss/Animal\\_Health/Equine\\_Biosecurity.html](http://cdfa.ca.gov/ahfss/Animal_Health/Equine_Biosecurity.html)). Here are her disease prevention suggestions for before, during, and after going to a horse show.

- **Only** take healthy horses to a show or event. This means no animals with fevers, nasal discharge, or abnormal feces get on the trailer, says Flynn.
- Before hitting the road, **do** consult your veterinarian to ensure your horse is current on vaccinations.
- **Do** travel with a current negative Coggins test, health certificate, and proof of required vaccination for all horses.



THE HORSE STAFF PHOTOS



At horse shows it's imperative to prevent horses from having nose-to-nose contact. Also, don't share tack unless cleaned and disinfected between horses; don't let hoses touch water buckets; don't share stall-cleaning equipment; dispose of needles properly; and take horses' temperatures daily.

- Upon arrival at the facility, **do** disinfect show stalls before moving your horse in, if possible.
- **Don't** let horses touch noses.
- **Don't** share communal water sources.
- **Don't** allow the hose to touch bucket surfaces when filling buckets.
- **Don't** submerge the hose in water

buckets while filling them.

- **Don't** share grooming supplies and tack (such as bits) unless cleaned and disinfected between uses.
- If you must share equipment (lead shanks, lip chains, bits/bridles, twitches, thermometers, grooming supplies, etc.), **do** disinfect it between horses.



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- **Don't** share cleaning equipment such as wheelbarrows and stall mucking tools.
- **Don't** share nose rags or towels.
- **Do** ask people to wash hands or use hand sanitizer before handling your horse.
- **Do** wash your hands or use hand sanitizer between handling or riding other people's horses.
- **Do** take horses' temperatures twice daily while at the show, and know each one's baseline.
- **Don't** share needles or syringes, and dispose of them properly in designated medical waste containers.
- **Do** ensure feed is secured in a vector-proof container (to keep out mice, etc.) at the show.
- **Do** store feed and hay off the ground and away from the elements.
- **Do** use mosquito repellents during mosquito season.
- **Do** restrict dogs from stabling areas.
- After the event's over, says Flynn, **don't** take unused hay or shavings back home with you from the show grounds. It could be harboring pathogens.
- **Do** isolate horses from the rest of the herd (ideally, for two weeks) upon returning from a show.
- **Do** clean and disinfect all tack and equipment used at the show.
- **Do** clean and disinfect horse trailers between uses.

### In the Breeding Shed

Reed Holyoak, DVM, PhD, Dipl. ACT, is the Bullock Equine Reproduction Endowed Professor and Head of the Veterinary Clinical Sciences Department at Oklahoma State University, in Stillwater. Much of his research centers around venereal infectious diseases such as equine viral arteritis (EVA). Here are his suggestions for disease prevention in the breeding shed.

- **Do** require mandatory negative Coggins for all incoming horses.
- **Do** require testing for venereal diseases such as EVA and contagious equine metritis, and have all horses arrive with a current vaccination status of major pathogens of concern, says Holyoak.
- **Do** isolate new arrivals for at least seven but ideally 14 days to prevent contact with resident horses (especially pregnant mares).



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Use sterile, disposable breeding equipment, such as plastic phantom covers and breeding roll sleeves, and discard it promptly and properly after each use.

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- **Do** make sure all personnel understand and follow biosecurity measures.
- **Do** wear barriers such as disposable gloves and protective clothing.
- **Do** wear disposable gloves when opening a shipping container and handling packages of shipped semen.
- **Don't** let horses touch noses.
- **Do** wash hands after each procedure, between handling horses, and before leaving the breeding shed.
- **Do** use sterile disposable equipment for insemination and discard it promptly and properly after use.
- **Do** disinfect all semen collection/processing/insemination equipment between horses. Clean the artificial vagina and its cover promptly after collection, rather than leaving it on a countertop or in a sink, says Holyoak.
- **Do** use separate, dedicated equipment such as halters, lead ropes, and blankets for each horse.
- If using a breeding roll during a live cover, **do** cover it with a disposable



THE HORSE STAFF PHOTOS

Wear barriers such as disposable gloves at all times, and after each breeding or collection, disinfect equipment immediately, such as the artificial vagina and its cover.

- plastic sleeve and change this sleeve between horses.
- **Do** apply a disposable plastic cover to the breeding phantom before each use, and disinfect the phantom between uses. Avoid difficult-to-disinfect cover materials, such as fleece, says Holyoak.
- If a twitch is used to restrain a mare during a live cover, **do** disinfect it prior to use on another horse.
- After each breeding session, **do** clean

and disinfect all facilities used to handle and breed mares, as well as the stocks and the shed itself, if possible.

### Take-Home Message

The risk of disease spread between horses differs depending on where you are and what you're doing. Keep these distinctions in mind, and always practice smart biosecurity, no matter the scenario. 🐾

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