Biosecurity is a set of management practices that reduces the potential for the introduction or spread of disease-causing agents. Setting up a yard plan and maintaining good biosecurity practices will:

- help prevent the introduction and spread of contagious diseases such as equine influenza and Strangles;
- assist in keeping the horses healthy and performing well;
- help prevent unnecessary disruption to equine activities and the operation of an equine business and the considerable associated costs.

**Vaccination** helps combat infection by stimulating an antibody response, which may either prevent disease occurring or reduce the severity of disease and the potential spread to other animals. They are very useful when their use is included in a yard biosecurity plan.

**Contact with horses at events/shows:**

- take your own buckets, and water if possible;
- avoid nose to nose contact between horses;
- wash your hands after you handle other horses;
- clean and disinfect your boots and outer clothing after each show;
- be aware of horses at the yard or stables that may have been exposed to disease e.g. at shows or events, and speak to your vet if you have any concerns.

**GENERAL BIOSECURITY POLICIES**

- Horse keepers should know their horse’s normal behaviour and vital signs and monitor them daily; and have a good knowledge of the signs of infectious disease.
- Ensure each horse has separate tack, rugs, grooming equipment and feed buckets.
- Wash hands before and after attending to a horse.
- Feed mangers and water buckets or drinkers should be cleaned daily.
- Regularly clean grooming kit, feed and water buckets, tack, rugs, stables and vehicles used to transport horses.
- Park vehicles away from the stables and ensure they are kept in clean condition.
- Ensure all feed stores are kept clean and tidy, doors are kept shut, windows are covered with fine mesh and feed is stored in vermin proof containers.
- Fix leaky taps, keep gutters/drains clear and remove objects that water can pool in.
- Dispose of dung away from horses and water courses. Keep dung heaps covered and dry to reduce their attraction as breeding grounds for biting insects.

**Choke** is a relatively common condition seen in horses and ponies and is typically caused by obstruction of the oesophagus (food pipe) with food; occasionally a foreign body can be involved e.g. wood or plastic. Fortunately many cases of choke resolve quickly and spontaneously and only cases in which the obstruction lasts for longer than 30 minutes are likely to require veterinary assistance.

It is important to note that this is not the same as the life-threatening condition in humans, where the term “choke” refers to blockage of the windpipe rather than the oesophagus. This difference means that unlike humans, horses with choke can still breathe.

**KEY POINTS**

- Don’t panic! Choke is rarely life-threatening and many cases will resolve spontaneously.
- Seek veterinary advice if the choke lasts more than 30 minutes and while waiting for the vet remove all food to prevent your horse eating and worsening the obstruction.
- Following an episode of choke it is worth monitoring your horse’s respiratory rate (normal <16 breaths/min) and rectal temperature for several days.
- Arrange regular dental check-ups for your horse to reduce the risk of choke as a result of a painful mouth.

**Clinical signs:**

- difficulty/repeated attempts at swallowing
- stretching/arching of the neck
- coughing
- food & saliva discharging from the nose
- drooling
- disinterest in food
- occasionally a lump may be seen or felt on the left side of the neck.

If you suspect your horse is suffering from choke it is important to prevent your horse eating as this will make the blockage worse and more difficult to clear.

If the obstruction doesn’t clear quickly of its own accord then veterinary assistance must be sought. There are a number of steps your vet can take to help to confirm and treat the problem.

Horses and ponies with dental problems (that prevent them grinding their food properly), individuals that bolt their food too quickly and those fed dry pelleted or cubed feeds are all at increased risk.
**Basic biosecurity for new arrivals**

- Isolate all new arrivals for a minimum of three weeks, ideally with limited shared airspace and downwind of the main barn (some diseases are airborne).
- Ensure that the horses in the isolation facilities are cared for by separate staff or after the other horses. Hands and boots should be washed before leaving the isolation area.
- All new horses should be up to date with equine influenza vaccines. Horses who have not previously been vaccinated or whose vaccinations have lapsed need should have completed the primary vaccination course (first two vaccines) prior to moving onto the yard.
- A strangles blood test with negative result must have been carried out in the week prior to moving to the yard.
- Ensure each horse has dedicated equipment and tack to prevent the potential spread of infection between horses.

**SIGNS OF DISEASE**

If a horse on the yard is displaying any of the following signs the yard owner and vet should be informed immediately:

- fever (high temperature)
- cough
- lymph node abscesses
- nasal discharge
- diarrhoea
- abortion
- incoordination.

**Risk assessment**

It can be very useful to perform a yard risk assessment with your vet to try and quantify your yard’s risk from infectious diseases. It depends on a number of factors such as the number of horses travelling regularly to shows, and the number of horses coming onto and off the yard.

**ALSO SEE THE FACTSHEET ON DEALING WITH A DISEASE OUTBREAK**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE SPEAK TO YOUR VET ABOUT SETTING UP A YARD BIOSECURITY PLAN BESPOKE TO YOUR INDIVIDUAL SITUATION**

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**REGULAR DENTAL EXAMINATIONS AND TREATMENT CAN REDUCE THE RISK OF CHOKE**