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# Biosecurity for Horse Owners



Biosecurity measures help reduce the possibility of your horses getting a serious disease and introducing it to your property. Biosecurity refers to management practices that reduce the risk of infectious disease to be carried onto a farm by animals or people and the spread of infectious disease on farms. Even horses that never travel need protection with good biosecurity at home.

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## Visitors

Limiting the visitor traffic on your farm can help reduce the risk of spreading germs from visitors to your animals.

- Ask visitors, including vets and farriers, to wear clean shoes and clothes. Alternatively, provide footbath stations before visitors enter areas where your horses are housed.

- Always work with the new horses last, or wear boots and coveralls when working with the new horses. Then remove them before working with your other horses.
- At all times, wash your hands thoroughly after working with the new horses.

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## New Horses

When bringing new horses or horses returning from a commingling site (such as a show, rodeo or vet clinic) onto your property, it is possible to bring diseases onto your farm.

- Keep the new horses separated from the rest of the horses for 30 days. Have separate equipment that is only for use in the isolation area for stall cleaning, feeding, watering and grooming.

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## Equipment

Clearly identify horse-specific equipment (e.g., feed tubs, water buckets and halters) as belonging to a particular horse and use it only for that horse.

Clean shared equipment (e.g., lead shanks, lip chains, bits/bridles, twitches, dose syringes, thermometers and grooming supplies) of organic debris and disinfect it between horses.

Launder and thoroughly dry cloth items (e.g., saddle cloths, towels, bandages, halter fleeces, rub or wipe rags) before using them on a new horse.

Equipment that cannot be effectively disinfected (e.g., sponges or brushes) should not be shared between horses.

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## Manure

- Manure is a potential pathogen source.
  - Manure composting helps to destroy pathogens and parasites.
- Compost manure before it is used as fertilizer on areas where other horses will be grazing.
- Avoid composting manure from sick animals.
  - Contain and remove manure from the premises as soon as possible.
- Avoid placing waste material from the stalls of sick horses onto open air manure piles or pits.
- Do not spread soiled bedding and manure from sick horses onto pastures.

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## Vaccination and General Health

Discuss the particular needs of your horses with your veterinarian, and identify which diseases are of consideration, based on what is prevalent or anticipated in your area and where you travel to with your horse.

To maintain your horses' good health, follow the recommended vaccination program\* based on your horses' age, environment, location and travel plans. Vaccination will help increase resistance to specific diseases and minimize the chances that your horses will become infected.

Vaccinate horses at least one month before entering or leaving a new facility. When administering vaccine or medications, always use a fresh needle and syringe for every horse, every time.

Routinely monitor animals for normal versus abnormal health status.

- Fever is a common early warning sign of an infectious disease. Monitoring rectal temperature daily may help with early detection of disease.
- Identify horses who may be more susceptible to infectious diseases (e.g., the very young, the very old, horses under stress or horses recovering from injury or disease) and ensure they are monitored on a daily basis.

Normal vital signs for horses at rest:

- Temp: 36.5-38.5 °C (97.7-101.3 °F)
- Heart Rate: 25-45 beats per minute
- Breathing: 8-16 breaths per minute
- Capillary Refill Time: 1-2 seconds
- Hydration (skin pinch test): 1-2 seconds.  
Healthy horses should have clear eyes, normal stance and no nasal discharge.

If you have sick horses or horses under quarantine on your property, restrict access to the area where they are housed. Post signs advising of illness or quarantine.

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## Record Keeping

Accurate record keeping is important for biosecurity.

Keep horse health records up to date with information on vaccination type and dates of administration, and records of illness and veterinary appointments.

Maintain facility records to keep track of new horse traffic onto your premises. This should include records of any noticeable illness for all horses on your premises. It should also include stabling allocation, safety procedures and emergency contacts.



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## Clothing and Footwear

You could accidentally carry diseases home to your horses on your clothing and footwear.

Keep a separate set of boots for when you travel to other horse locations and wear coveralls if you're working with horses on another farm. Also, change your clothes upon returning home.

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## Pest Management

Insect vectors can spread many equine infectious diseases, including West Nile Virus, Western and Eastern Equine Encephalomyelitis (mosquitoes), Equine Infectious Anemia (horse flies and deer flies), and Equine Granulocytic Anaplasmosis or Lyme disease (ticks).

Destroying or preventing insect breeding areas is an effective method for reducing insect populations near your horses.

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## Emergency Response

Rapidly responding to disease events can reduce the impact on your farm and on surrounding farms.

Having a disease response plan prepared ahead of time is crucial.

It should include:

- triggers for the response plan (e.g., any signs of unexplained illness);
- details of who to contact (veterinarian or local CFIA office);
- plan for limiting movements of animals, people or vehicles to and from the premises; and
- any other measures determined by you and your veterinarian.



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## Other Resources

- [American Association of Equine Practitioners, Vaccination Guidelines](#)

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## Contact us

- Call us at 204-945-7663 in Winnipeg
- Email us at [chiefveterinaryoffice@gov.mb.ca](mailto:chiefveterinaryoffice@gov.mb.ca)
- Go to [manitoba.ca/agriculture](http://manitoba.ca/agriculture)
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For more information, you can also contact your veterinarian.