

# A coordinated approach

Jan Rogers head of development at the British Equestrian Federation explains their new biosecurity initiative in preventing the spread of disease

**T**he term 'biosecurity' in the context of animals, involves acting to prevent the introduction of disease agents into an environment. It takes a comprehensive approach which encompasses different means of prevention and containment. Two crucial elements are the control of disease agents already present in a particular environment, as well as preventing transmission of new diseases. Biosecurity takes into account the epidemiological triangle of individual host animal, the disease itself and the environment contributing to disease susceptibility.

There is a wealth of information on equine disease occurrences available from national and international organisations, and a number of highly competent organisations interpreting this information. This can help us, as horse owners, riders and competitors to manage how we care for our horses and minimise the risk of spread, protecting our world from the serious implications of disease outbreak.

There is a good deal of work underway already, yet there is a need for an improved coordination. Since the British Equestrian Federation (BEF) has 19 member bodies, it seems like a good place to start. The member bodies have called for central support to develop a biosecurity policy for everyday yard and venue management and a further more responsive protocol, which will enable them to advise their own members and competition venues with confidence and consistency and that will come into force should there be an incidence of disease. So, using the information already available, and the expertise at our fingertips, the BEF is working with its members to develop these initiatives.

## Reinventing the wheel?

A good deal of work has already been done by worldwide bodies, so reinventing the wheel can be avoided. The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) is an intergovernmental organisation, which has been managing animal disease since



the 1920s and works closely with the Federation Equestre Internationale (FEI) - the international governing body for horse sports. Meeting regularly, our own UK Equine Disease Coalition sets out to increase the UK level of preparedness for a major equine disease outbreak, and offers a highly informed domestic perspective in terms of our responsiveness to the international scene. From this considerable information available here, and that held by individual recreational and competition bodies, the plan is to form a comprehensive plan.

## A two part plan

Once work is underway, member bodies will comment and add so that the outcome, which will be in the form of an easy to understand best practice manual, is as workable for large competition bodies as it is for smaller and charitable organisations.

Technical experts, where available within the member bodies, will be recruited to the agile response panel which will be overseen by the BEF's John Mc Ewen, Director of Equine Sports Science and Medicine for Equestrian Team GBR, which will evaluate information and, in conjunction with the marketing and communications team, ensure that this information is communicated to owners, competitors and venues. The plan is to minimise the risk of disease spread and manage the economic impact.

## Case study

Equine Influenza (EI) broke out in Australia in 2007. Not normally fatal this disease but can adversely affect older, compromised, or younger horses and, can severely impair performance. Because of strict quarantine measures, EI is not endemic in Australia and horses were unvaccinated. The outbreak affected racehorses, competition and recreational horses and lasted from August 2007 until February 2008. Horse movements came to a national standstill for a period and over 100,000 horses contracted the virus. The outbreak is reported as the most costly animal disease emergency in

## Disease tracking information, advice and interpretation:

- World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) [www.oie.int](http://www.oie.int)
- Information Exchange on Infectious Animal Disease, Animal Health Trust <http://www.aht.org.uk/cms-display/international-breeders-meeting.html>
- Defra, Animal Health Trust & British Equine Veterinary Association Quarterly Reports [http://www.aht.org.uk/cms-display/DEFRA\\_AHT\\_BEVA\\_equine\\_reports.html](http://www.aht.org.uk/cms-display/DEFRA_AHT_BEVA_equine_reports.html)
- British Equine Veterinary Association Biosecurity Checklist [http://www.beva.org.uk/\\_uploads/documents/equine-health-checklist-final-march13.pdf](http://www.beva.org.uk/_uploads/documents/equine-health-checklist-final-march13.pdf)
- UK Equine Disease Coalition – <http://www.worldhorsewelfare.org/disease-coalition>
- Contingency Plan for Exotic Notifiable Diseases of Animals in England – reviewed annually

Australian history. It is precisely this sort of compromise to equine welfare and the financial integrity of the equine sector, which we are looking to avoid.

### Individual responsibility

In a nutshell –follow a simple industry checklist. The British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA) has a checklist, produced by the equine sector in conjunction with Defra, available to download at the link in the information box. Every yard should have a copy on its wall and every horse owner should live and breathe its contents. Following this checklist is critical to ensuring that owners

take the most effective steps possible to protect the health of their horse, and the health of others' horses. It has been carefully designed to be very easy to follow and contains five simple headings.

Surveillance is key to biosecurity, and not all horse owners are aware of the meaning of the term. An informal event participant poll in 2014 indicated that only a third of those questioned understood what the term meant and that they as individual horse owners, could have a big impact on how and whether disease is spread. Awareness is key to biosecurity and this begins at home. If each owner followed the checklist and was aware of their horse's normal

body temperature, able to pick up slight deviations from this norm, follow this up by preventing that horse's contact with other horses if it had a raised temperature, and take steps not to contact other horses themselves, this would have a huge impact on the reduction of disease spread.

In conclusion, it is no *body's* responsibility to practice good biosecurity, it is *everybody's* responsibility. The actions we all take day to day are as crucial as developing policies and procedures. We can play our part but it only works if horse owners play theirs. equine HEALTH

● *Further information: jan.rogers@bef.co.uk*

A checklist for equine health				
This guide should be used to ensure responsible horse management. Seek advice from a suitable person/vet or professional body.				
1 Arrivals	2 General	3 Health	4 Disease	5 Transport
<p><b>ORIGIN AND STATUS</b> - risk assess the horse even before arrival, depending where it is from (the passport may help here), e.g. is it from abroad (including the Republic of Ireland) and if so, how long ago? Also what is its worming or vaccination history?</p> <p><b>PREPARE</b> - clean/disinfect* box, isolation area, equipment and storage; review documents (livery agreements, information from new owners on vaccination/ worming etc.)</p> <p><b>GENERAL HEALTH CHECK</b> - on arrival: behaving normally; good appetite; no cuts, wounds or swellings; moving normally and sound</p> <p><b>RISK</b> - based on above, use to determine whether to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Test, e.g. worm egg count, blood test for Strangles, EIA (come from abroad), tapeworms, piroplasmiasis, other?</li> <li>● Isolate, minimum period two weeks (also see column 4)</li> </ul> <p><b>INTEGRATE</b> after isolation period, gradually and carefully, to avoid social stress and injury</p> <p>*Government approved general purpose disinfectant</p>	<p><b>GENERAL HEALTH CHECK</b> - (see column 1) - minimum twice daily if stabled, once daily if at grass</p> <p><b>NUTRITION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Water available at all times</li> <li>● Feed, forage and graze according to type, work, weight and season</li> <li>● Establish a routine</li> <li>● Record weight regularly</li> <li>● Seek advice from nutritionist or vet (feed manufacturers/ merchant)</li> <li>● Beware overweight as well as underweight; all horses have a laminitis risk</li> </ul> <p><b>EQUIPMENT SHARE</b> - try to avoid, especially tack, headcollars, brushes, rugs, mucking out kit. Never share syringes or needles between horses</p> <p><b>MUCK CONTROL</b> - poo-pick regularly; site muckheap away from horses; arrange regular muckheap disposal</p> <p><b>HEAT CONTROL</b> - depending on the season, weather or work level. Wash down after exercise; clip and rug as appropriate</p> <p><b>BREEDING</b> - risk-based prebreeding testing for disease (e.g. CEM, EVA) essential for natural covering and AI. Also, correct certification/ identification/ record keeping. Follow industry codes, e.g. HBLB Code. Use vet or qualified technicians</p>	<p><b>WHICH VET</b> - all horses should be registered with a practice and contact number displayed. Yard manager should appoint a 'yard vet' for coordinating disease, health and general advice</p> <p><b>CONSULT</b> if ill, injured, lame, swelling, discharge, off food or water, or concerned in any way</p> <p><b>VACCINATION</b> - Tetanus is very important; Influenza, and maybe EHV, are important in livery yards and animals mixing at shows; Strangles vaccination requires risk assessment and planning with your yard vet; EHV and Rotavirus in studs; EVA in some stallions</p> <p><b>PARASITE CONTROL</b> - worm egg counts and strategic worming programme. External parasite control - flies, lice, mange, ticks. Consider mosquito/midge breeding sites especially standing water. Sweet Itch control essential</p> <p><b>FINANCES</b> - charities can help with advice and solutions, but not vets fees.</p>	<p><b>DISEASE RISK</b> is constant and increasing from both endemic disease (eg. Strangles) and exotic disease (eg. EIA). Be vigilant especially in recently imported animals. Seek advice from your vet</p> <p><b>SUSPECT</b> - always isolate if illness suspected or a horse has been off the premises at a risky event (eg. been in contact with sick horse at a show)</p> <p><b>ISOLATE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Stable and graze away from other horses eg. own paddock (preferably without ability to "nose-touch" over fence, ideally 10 metres separation). Any in contact companions should be separated and monitored too</li> <li>● Barrier management - wash hands; dedicated over-clothes; disinfectant* boot dip; schedule handling after contact with other horses; no sharing of equipment/utensils</li> <li>● How long - risk dependent, seek veterinary advice</li> </ul> <p><b>EUTHANASIA</b> - old, sick or injured animals may require euthanasia which should not be avoided but must be done humanely by a vet or a licensed slaughterman. Disposal of the body can be costly, so plan for this eventuality</p>	<p><b>SAFETY</b> - ensure horsebox/trailer is suitable and is well maintained, including flooring and partitions. Be aware of the Emergency Services Protocol (BEVA and Fire and Rescue Service)</p> <p><b>REQUIREMENTS</b> - valid (equine) passport; Horseboxes will have to be roadworthy (i.e. MOT inspected) and drivers will need to have (a) the appropriate driving licence and (b) if driving as part of an economic activity etc they will need a Certificate of Competence</p> <p><b>PREPARE</b> - muck out, clean and disinfect* vehicle after each journey or before journey if vehicle unused for some time. Train all horses to load/travel as they may need to be transported in an emergency (eg. to the vets)</p> <p><b>TRAVEL</b> Separate from other animals for safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Risk Assess - long journeys can bring out disease and increase risk of catching disease</li> <li>● Water and Feed/Forage should be taken on any journey in case of breakdown or heavy traffic</li> <li>● Record overnight stays away from yard of one night or more (eg. in yard diary)</li> </ul>

Produced for the equine sector in conjunction with government. [www.beva.org.uk](http://www.beva.org.uk)