

Biosecurity for Horses

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What is biosecurity?

Biosecurity is a set of best practices that help horse owners to prevent and reduce the spread of disease. When traveling to and from different facilities with your horse, biosecurity plans are very important!

Why is biosecurity important?

Any time your horse is in contact with horses from different facilities, it could potentially be exposed to new pathogens and diseases. Sometimes these illnesses can take weeks to appear after you have returned home. In the meantime, your horse could be shedding germs and infecting other horses at your barn.

Preparing and following a biosecurity plan is key to preventing disease in your horse and other horses at your barn.

Prevention vs Containment

Preventing disease in horses is far less expensive than controlling disease within a horse or facility (Figure 1). Practicing good biosecurity and having a good biosecurity plan in place can greatly reduce the chance of disease!



Figure 1. Preventative measures to protect against infectious disease.

Here are some best practices to follow before, during, and after hauling horses off property:

Before leaving



- **Maintain a valid VCPR**

A good veterinarian-client-patient-relationship (VCPR) will ensure that signs of illness are caught quickly and that preventative health measures such as vaccinations and de-worming protocols are in place.

- **Know what is normal for your horse(s)**

Know your horse's normal temperature, pulse, and respiration as well as behavior so that you can quickly tell when something is abnormal (Figure 2).

- **Leave sick horses at home!**

Some key signs to watch for are fever, nasal discharge, and diarrhea.

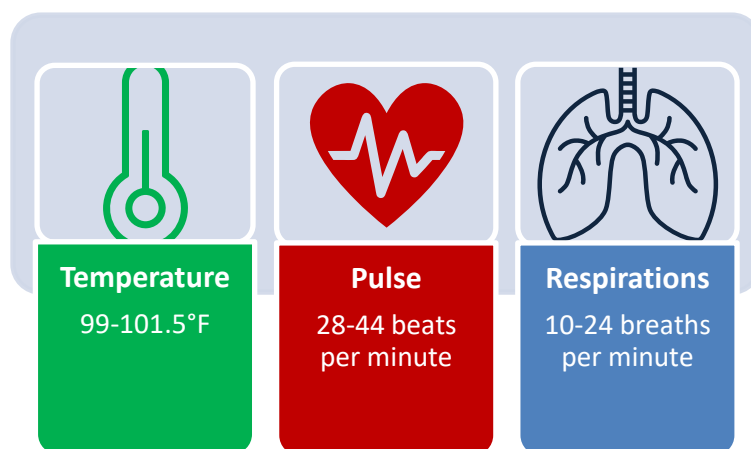


Figure 2. Normal ranges for equine temperature, heart rate (pulse), and respirations.



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When off property



Ideally, you should limit the general public's contact with your horse and limit your contact with other horses.

- ***Don't share tack or equipment between horses***

Each horse should have its own grooming supplies, blankets, and tack. Do not share halters and lead ropes. If you do have to share equipment, ensure it is properly disinfected prior to use on another horse.

Do not share feed buckets, hay nets, or water buckets between horses from different facilities. Bring your own water and feed buckets. Do not dip the end of the hose into your water bucket when filling it as it could be contaminated from other buckets (Figure 5). If possible, disinfect the nozzle prior to use.



Figure 3. Limit nose to nose contact with horses from different properties as well as contact with the public when possible. Photos by Elizabeth Share.

- ***Minimize nose to nose contact***

Do not let your horse sniff another horse's face when they are from different facilities or have been off farm (Figure 3).

Avoid common areas (e.g., wash stalls, tack stalls) if possible. At the very least, avoid allowing your horse to place its face/nose where other horses have been tied.

Avoid hand grazing your horse where other horses have grazed.

- ***Clean and disinfect stalls and trailers***

If possible, clean and disinfect stalling areas at facilities (e.g., shows, campgrounds). Even better, keep your horse at your trailer (Figure 4)!

If possible, use your own trailer to haul your horse and avoid having your horse hauled with other horses outside your facility.

Always clean and disinfect horse trailers before and after use. Make sure surfaces are clean and dry prior to applying the disinfectant.



Figure 4. Horse kept at the trailer at a show. Spraying disinfectant in stall. Photos by Elizabeth Share.

- ***Wash your hands!***

Frequently wash your hands with warm, soapy water or use a 62% ethyl alcohol hand gel before and after handling other horses.



Figure 5. Example of what to do and not do when watering horses. Photos by Elizabeth Share.

After you get back



• **Quarantine after the event**

When horses return to your facility after an event where horses from other facilities are present, quarantine those horses from horses kept at home for 14 days.

Feed and care for these horses last!

Monitor your horse daily for signs of fever, nasal discharge, and diarrhea (Figure 6). Ideally, take horses' temperatures twice daily (AM and PM) during quarantine.

Early detection is crucial for infectious disease!

• **Disinfect!**

Wash your hands, shower, and change your clothes and shoes before working with horses kept at home.

Disinfect grooming supplies, tack, and feeding equipment (e.g., buckets, hay bags, etc.) (Figure 7).

Ideally, designate items for home-use only and travel-use only.

Quick and easy disinfectant:

Diluted bleach (8 ounces of bleach to 1 gallon of water) is an inexpensive disinfectant.

Take Home Message

- Being proactive and having a biosecurity plan in place prior to a disease outbreak will save time, money, and potential heartbreak.
- Have a quarantine plan in place before an animal becomes sick.
- Disinfect equipment every time it leaves the premise.
- Avoid all forms of nose-to-nose contact with unknown horses.
- Bring your own equipment to shows and keep your horse at your trailer when possible.
- Know the risks of failing to utilize biosecurity best practices.



Nasal Discharge

Watch for colored discharge

Feces

Watch for loose, watery feces

Figure 6. Monitor secretions when assessing horse health and possible disease. Photos by Elizabeth Share and Sara Mastellar.



Figure 7. Halters and grooming brushes soaking in disinfectant. Photo by Elizabeth Share.

Additional Resources

- [Equine Disease Communication Center: Biosecurity](#)
- [University of Minnesota: Biosecurity Tips](#)
- [Penn State University: Biosecurity at Horse Events](#)
- [The Horse: How to Disinfect Your Farm](#)
- [University of Arizona: Knowing What is Normal for Your Horse](#)

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