

Primefact

Horse Events: Biosecurity Guidelines for Organisers and Competitors

December 2025, Primefact PUB25/201
Animal Biosecurity, NSW DPIRD

Introduction

All event participants have a responsibility to maintain good biosecurity and not put the health of other people's horses at risk.

Horses at events have the potential to spread infectious disease. Horse events act as multipliers for the spread of infectious diseases should an outbreak occur.

Horses that are suspected of suffering from infectious or contagious diseases or have been in contact with other animals suffering from such diseases **MUST NOT** be brought to horse events.

Definition of a Horse Event

A horse event is a gathering of ten or more horses from 3 or more properties. A horse event or activity is defined as any market, show, sale, fair, parade, race meeting, recreational activity, clinic, competition or any other horse gathering.

Recommendations for Event Organisers

Event organisers should make it clear that they expect individual members of their organisations and participants at their events to manage their own biosecurity risks.

But at the same time organisers should be aware that they have a duty of care to participants and their horses. They should analyse the potential disease risks and impacts of a disease outbreak at events, and develop a biosecurity strategy to manage and minimise those risks.

For example, club committee members or event organisers should:

- Organise a veterinarian to be on call
 - Appoint a Horse Health Steward, who understands the biosecurity risks of horses coming together at horse events.
 - Document a number to call in an emergency, or an alternate method of communication, and ensure participants are aware of this
 - Minimise public access to stable areas
 - Spread stabling allocation as much as possible to minimise nose to nose contact between horses from different locations
 - Provide separate vehicle parking areas for competitors and spectators
 - Create a single entry and exit to grounds
 - Provide adequate horse washing facilities
 - Provide adequate hand washing facilities
 - Provide taps for filling water buckets for horses.
 - Not provide communal water troughs
 - Designate an area that a horse can be moved to should it become ill during the event
 - Develop a contingency plan should a stock standstill be declared while horses are in attendance for an event.
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General Record Keeping

Clubs and organisations should maintain details of members and their horses including:

- The property identification code (PIC) or address where the horse is usually resident
- The name, address and telephone number of the owner or person normally in charge of the horse
- The description of each horse
- The registered name (or in the absence of a registered name, the pet name) of each horse
- Microchip number or other unique identifier of each horse

Horse Event Management

Horse event registration is not a requirement (as it was for some time after the Equine influenza outbreak in 2007).

However the more information that can be kept about horses attending events, the easier it will be to trace them in the event of an emergency.

It is highly recommended that horse event organisers collect and retain information on horses attending events. If the event is a members-only type event, attendance should still be recorded. For example, it may be essential to know who attended pony club that month, if one of the attendees develops signs of a contagious disease a few days later.

For events open to all comers, the minimum recommendation is:

- the name, address and telephone number of the owner or person normally in charge of the horse
- the property identification code (PIC) or address where the horse is usually resident and if possible
- the registered name (or in the absence of a registered name the pet name) of each horse
- microchip number or other unique identifier of each horse
- Details on horses and owners should be available at the entry point for use when horses arrive at the event. Horses leaving the site should also be recorded (date and time) on a log in case tracing is necessary.

Event organisers should keep horse event attendance records for a period of six (6) months.

These records should be made available to an inspector upon request.

Horse Owner Responsibilities

The primary responsibility for biosecurity at events lies with the horse owners and riders, well before the event.

Owners and those providing agistment for horses should have their own biosecurity plans on properties where horses are kept.

For details on setting up a Biosecurity plan see the [Horse Venue Biosecurity Workbook](#)

Basic Principles

Before the Event

- Minimise risk of disease introduction through double fencing on boundaries, keeping vaccinations current,

- Any new arrivals on the property of origin should be kept away from other horses for at least 14 days.
- Observe good hygiene around horses, especially after handling other people's horses.
- Wash hands with soap and water, or use disinfectant hand solution immediately after handling horses, especially after contact with the mouth or nose.
- Consciously monitor your horse's health, especially in the 3-5 days leading up to an event.
- Check horses are eating and drinking normally.
- Check for any change in behaviour.
- Check for any unusual nasal discharge.
- Check for any coughing.
- Check for any signs of discomfort or unusual stance or weight shifting.
- Check for any signs of swelling or lameness.
- Check your horse's temperature daily for 3 days before an event. (A horse's average normal temperature is between 37 and 38.5°C at rest.)
- Wash horse(s) before departure

At the Event

- Take a thermometer with you to the event, to check the horse if it seems unwell.
- Do not share feed or water containers.
- Do not use communal water troughs.
- Only share cleaned gear. (Bits should not be shared or be cleaned very thoroughly if this is necessary.)
- If stabling is not allocated and is not full, leave an empty stall between your horses and those from other locations.
- If stables are full, consider erecting tarpaulins or some other physical barrier to prevent nose to nose contact with other horses.
- If your horse becomes unwell at the event, contact an event official.

More Information

Web: <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/animals-and-livestock/horses>

Email: <mailto:Animal.biosecurity@dpird.nsw.gov.au>

Examples of Infectious Horse Diseases

Head Colds/Flu/ Respiratory Diseases – These are viral diseases caused by common viruses like Equine Herpes Virus, Equine Rhinitis Viruses, Equine Adenovirus, and Equine Arteritis Virus. These diseases are common amongst young horses especially, when they are first mixed. While they mostly have a low impact on the horse's long-term health they may cause considerable inconvenience by interrupting training regimens. Complications can occur if horses are put back into full work too soon after such an infection.

Strangles – a contagious, upper respiratory tract bacterial infection of horses and other equines. The disease is uncommon in performance horses but has a high impact on horse health and deaths can occur. Recovery and treatment are prolonged. Vaccination is available, but not always appropriate (consult your veterinarian). For more information see the DPIRD Primefact [strangles](#)

Diarrhoea – serious bacterial infection of the bowel (e.g. Salmonella, Clostridial disease). These diseases are rare, but if contracted are often fatal.

Ringworm – a contagious superficial fungal skin disease, it can affect humans and spreads very easily, it has a low impact on the horse's health and is relatively commonplace. The disease has a short recovery period.

Equine Influenza – a highly infectious respiratory viral disease, eradicated from Australia on 30th June, 2008. For more information see the NSW DPIRD laboratory [equine influenza](#) page

Hendra virus: not highly infectious but high consequence disease –

Hendra virus is a virus that is carried by bats and is occasionally transmitted to horses, most via feed and water contamination from bat urine or bat body fluids. It generally causes sudden, severe disease with neurological and /or respiratory signs in horses, usually resulting in death. It can also spread from horses to humans.

While Hendra virus is **not highly infectious** compared to the diseases listed above, the severe consequences of the disease mean that it must be considered in biosecurity strategies to prevent transmission at horse events.

It is possible for Hendra virus to spread from horse to horse where horses are in close contact, particularly where horses are stabled, as at many horse events.

For more information see the NSW DPIRD [Hendra Virus](#) webpage.

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