

Risk Assessments for Equestrian Events

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All equestrian events, large and small, represent a disease risk. It is impossible to reduce the risk of disease to zero and the goal of all event organisers should be to reduce the risk to the lowest possible level. Biosecurity for equestrian events is therefore a **risk reduction** exercise rather than a **risk elimination** exercise. The degree of risk reduction that can be achieved varies from event to event and depends on the design of the venue, the infection control policies and procedures in place and the attitudes of all those involved: without a willingness to implement biosecurity measures meaningful reduction in disease risk will not be achieved. Event organisers must work with their veterinarians to determine acceptable risk and also define an infection control programme that has achievable outcomes

Principles of infection control at a venue

All events, small and large, should have an event biosecurity plan detailing the measures to be taken before horses arrive and during their stay. The plan should consider both the facilities and the organisation of the event. Very importantly, in addition to detailing the measures required to reduce the risk of disease entry the plan should include an outbreak control plan detailing the actions required if a disease outbreak is suspected or confirmed. Consideration of when horses can be released from the event venue and the actions required when horses return to their home stables should also be included. The first step in developing a biosecurity plan is to conduct a risk assessment for disease entry and spread into the event.

Infection control at small and large events: key points

- Understand and assess the disease risks
- Understand how different diseases transmit
- Only bring healthy horses to events
- Check horse health on arrival
- Monitor horse health at the event
- Limit exposure to disease and reduce risk of disease transmission at the event
- Take precautions for horses returning home
- Understand cleaning and disinfection and implement effectively

The risk assessment should include consideration of venue layout, stabling, horse entry health requirements, health monitoring on arrival and during the event, feed and bedding arrangements, opportunities for comingling of horses, opportunities for contact between horses and between people and horses, access to the stable areas, isolation facilities, ability to clean and disinfect stables, walkways and other high traffic areas, location of parking and public areas in relation to the stable areas. The aim of the risk assessment is to determine whether the event is at low, medium or high risk of disease entry and spread. Each item within the assessment can then be used as basis for determining the changes need to reduce risk to an acceptable level.

Risk assessment: venue facilities

Facility	Low risk	Medium risk	High risk
Stabling	More stables than needed allowing separation between groups	Slightly more stables than needed with limited separation possible	Exact number of stables needed with no separation possible
	Well separated traditional stable blocks; small well ventilated barns	Traditional stable blocks with little separation; medium sized well ventilated barns	Closely packed traditional stable blocks; large barns, especially if poorly ventilated
	Stabled in small groups	Stabled in medium size groups	Stabled in large groups
	Stabled by team or yard of origin with separation	Stabled by team or yard of origin with no separation	Not stabled by team or yard of origin
	Solid, easily cleaned impervious walls	Solid walls not easily cleaned or not impervious	Half walls, bars or gap boards, not impervious
Feed and water	Individual water and feed buckets	Sharing of feed and water buckets	Communal water troughs and shared feed areas
	Hay and feed kept covered in secure area	Hay and feed uncovered in secure area	Hay and feed not covered and not in a secure area
Isolation area	Designated empty stable area or barn at least 50m from other stables	Designated empty stable area or barn close to main venue stabling	Stables within main venue stable areas
	No unauthorised access	Some ability to limit access by riders/grooms and public	No ability to restrict rider/groom or public access
Horse mixing areas	No shared warm up and circulation areas	Shared warm up and circulation areas but with restricted horse-horse contact	Shared warm up and circulation areas with horse-horse contact possible
Wash down boxes	No horse-horse contact	Limited horse-horse contact	Frequent horse-horse contact happens easily
	Equipment not shared	Restricted equipment sharing	No restrictions on equipment sharing
	Wash down cleaned after each horse	Wash down cleaned periodically each day	Wash down cleaned at the end of each day

Risk assessment: organisation (policies and procedures)

Policy	Low risk	Medium risk	High risk
Horse health entry requirements	Healthy horses only policy – certification required	Healthy horses only policy – declaration required	No health entry requirements

Health information from point of embarkation	Clinical examination carried out and findings recorded	Visual inspection only and findings recorded	No inspection or clinical examination carried out
Horse health check before on arrival before venue entry	Health check conducted before entry into venue with ability to divert to isolation facility	Health check conducted after arrival at venue but before entry into stables	Health check conducted in stables or no health check carried out
Designated stables	Stables designated to individual horses	Stables designated to teams, groups or shipments of horses	Stables not designated
Owner/rider/transporter information recording	Points of embarkation, rider, owner and shipping agent details, destination address after departure from event recorded	Partial information available	No information available
Monitoring health during event including temperature recording	All horses monitored daily, rectal temperatures monitored twice daily and recorded	Event staff patrol stables but horses not examined	No monitoring
Reporting suspicion of disease	Participants notified in advance of the event that suspicion of disease must be reported	Participants notified on arrival that suspicion must be reported	No requirement to report suspicion of disease
Equipment sharing	Participants briefed in advance that equipment sharing is not allowed	Signs displayed in the stables discourage sharing	Sharing equipment not discouraged
Hygiene policies for personnel	All personnel briefed before the event on mandatory hand washing protocols and use of disinfectant in between horses	Signs encourage hand washing and disinfectant use	No policies on hand washing or disinfection after handling horses or equipment
Hygiene policies for stables, walkways, vet clinic areas during and after competition	Cleaning and disinfection follows approved protocols using appropriate disinfectants correctly diluted and is carried out by trained staff	C&D does not follow a set protocol or does not use appropriate disinfectants	No C&D policy or C&D left up to individual participants