



## **Biosecurity Measures for Horses**

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### **What is biosecurity?**

Biosecurity is the set of precautions taken or protocols set in place to decrease the risk of spreading infectious disease within a facility or between multiple facilities or animals. In other words, it's the steps we take to keep our animals from catching an illness from another animal.

### **Why is biosecurity so important?**

Many illnesses that horses get are transmissible not only to other horses, but sometimes to people and other animals as well. Some of these diseases require direct or close contact, but others are transmissible on clothes, tires, halters, or even on people or other animals. This means that not only is it important to be aware of what horses come onto your farm, but also what other animals come onto your farm and what animals you come into contact with away from your farm. Common diseases where a tight biosecurity protocol can stop or decrease spread and illness in animals include strangles, herpes virus, equine flu, salmonella diarrhea, clostridial diarrhea, and E. Coli diarrhea.

### **When should I implement biosecurity measures?**

Biosecurity is most effective when it is always in place. This doesn't mean that you must quarantine your farm and make everyone who visits your farm step through a decontamination chamber before coming through the gate, but there are a few simple procedures that can help keep your horse safe.

- 1) Always know the vaccination and deworming history of other horses that are coming in contact with your horse.
- 2) Never let your horse touch noses or share tack, water, or feed with a horse that has any obvious signs of illness, such as a snotty nose, diarrhea, or dull hair coat.
- 3) If you visit other animals, change your clothes before going to your barn. This works both ways- it is courteous to change out of the clothes you wear around your animals before coming in contact with other people's animals as well.
- 4) Always wash your hands between handling animals. This includes animals of different species, and animals in the same barn or on the same farm.
- 5) Foot baths of 10% bleach outside stalls (especially those of sick horses) or at building entrances and exits can help decrease spread.
- 6) Do not share halters, lead ropes, or other tack between horses, and if there is ever a sick horse isolate it, handle it last, and dedicate a single pitchfork and water buckets to that horse.

### **How long do I keep my biosecurity measures in place?**

As previously discussed, some small biosecurity measures are easy to keep in place all the time. When more strict biosecurity measures are called for, the time where disease transmission is possible is different for each infection, but a general rule is to keep biosecurity measures in place for at least 21-28 days after the last animal has shown a clinical sign. This can unfortunately lead to several months of quarantine in some cases as a disease spreads through a herd or several barns, but in the end may save horses from illness, costly veterinary bills, and possibly death.

### **How do I increase my biosecurity to keep my horses safe?**

Just as the length of time to keep a quarantine in place varies with the infectious agent, so too does the best method for decreasing disease transmission. In general there are two kinds of highly infectious diseases in horses- respiratory and diarrheal diseases. In respiratory diseases, the spread is often aerosolized (a horse sneezes and spreads the virus) or spread by close contact (touching noses). Diarrheal diseases are almost always spread in a fecal-to-oral fashion, meaning that a horse must come in contact with a sick horses' feces in order to become exposed.

In the case of respiratory disease, people can often spread disease on fomites, or objects that transmit the disease (such as halters, lead ropes, hats, or even our own hair, clothing, and skin). In the case of a respiratory disease it is important to wear caps, isolation gowns or coveralls, gloves, and booties while handling infected horses. Always remove this outer layer of clothing before handling another horse or leaving the farm. If you are going to see other animals that could be vulnerable, it is best to shower and change clothes.

If the disease is diarrheal, the most important things you can do are have a foot bath outside the stall of every infectious horse, isolate the horse in a separate barn, do not share stall cleaning equipment between horses, and handle these horses last. And, as always, wash your hands between handling horses!

Contact Brandon Equine Medical Center at 813-643-7177 or email [info@brandonequine.com](mailto:info@brandonequine.com) with any questions regarding this topic.

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