



Biosecurity is a big word that many livestock owners don't fully understand. Let's break it down. Bio means life; biology is the study of life; biosecurity is a term that literally means securing life. In the agricultural context we often hear government officials talk about biosecurity with the U.S. food supply (i.e., protecting U.S. citizens by inspecting food production facilities and imported food products). As horse owners, we also need to be aware of disease threats and do our part to not only prevent disease from infecting our horse herds but also to prevent it from spreading to others.

There are a few simple things that all horse owners can do to improve biosecurity on and off the farm.

On & Off the Farm

- Designate a pair of boots to wear only on your farm and with your animals.
- Designate a pair of boots to wear when you visit others' farms and/or sale facilities.
- Change clothing after handling your animals.
- Change clothing after handling others' animals.
- Limit/eliminate standing water.
- Maintain clean water tubs.
- Separate horses for feeding and assign designated feed buckets.
- At shows, trail rides, and other equine events, do not allow your horse to drink from a "public water tub" or share buckets and equipment with others.
- Assign each horse his/her own halter, lead rope, grooming equipment, and tack.
- Thoroughly wash and disinfect* items (grooming tools, bits, and other equipment) before and after using on or for an unassigned horse—note leather cannot be sanitized, but cleaning and allowing to sit in the sun is helpful.
- If borrowing equipment from other farms thoroughly wash and disinfect* before using (this even applies to tractors, trailers, and other farm equipment).
- Disinfect* your equipment and vehicles prior to entering the barn and pasture areas if they have been offsite or used with ill animals.

- Work with your veterinarian to develop and administer a herd health protocol to include at a minimum a regular Coggins testing and vaccination schedule and deworming strategy.
- Horses that travel should follow the new horse isolation/quarantine procedures upon every return before being reintroduced to the herd.

At Shows, Trail Rides, and Other Equestrian Events

- Use only your own equipment: avoid sharing halters, lead ropes, wheelbarrows, muck fork, tack, etc.
- Only feed and water your horse using your buckets and tubs: if possible, do not allow your horse to eat or drink from shared sources; i.e., water tubs, hay feeders, grain tubs; do not allow other horses to eat or drink from your water tubs, hay feeders, etc.
- Keep your horse away from others: don't let your horse touch other horses or their equipment.
- If possible, stable with at least one empty stall between your horses and other horses.
- Disinfect* any equipment that is shared or comes into contact with another horse.
- Talk to your veterinarian about a vaccination protocol to best suit your horse's disease exposure risk.

Visitors

- Provide plastic protective pull-on boot covers or require visitors to walk through a disinfecting foot bath before entering your animal facility.
- Provide hand sanitizer or a wash area and have visitors wash/sanitize their hands upon entering and exiting your facility.
- Keep visitors from driving any unsanitized vehicles or equipment into your barn and pasture areas.

* See note on next page regarding disinfection.



New Horses

- Require all horses to be presented with a current negative Coggins test prior to entering your facility.
- Isolate (quarantine) new animals for 2-6 weeks before introducing to the herd. Isolation facilities should at a minimum disallow any physical contact between horses and should limit/eliminate the ability of horses to pass bodily fluids including saliva and nasal discharge.
- Only handle new/isolated horses after handling all other animals on your property.
- Walk through a disinfecting foot bath before entering and exiting the isolation area.
- Launder clothing after attending isolated animals.
- Designate halter, lead rope, feed and water receptacles specifically for horses in isolation.
- Work with your veterinarian to evaluate new animals for compliance with your vaccination and deworming protocols.
- Before integrating new horses to your herd, administer all necessary vaccinations and other preventative health care measures as recommended by your veterinarian and in accordance with your preventative herd health protocol.

Managing Ill Horses

If you have an ill animal (regardless of species):

- Work with your veterinarian to develop an appropriate treatment and quarantine protocol.
- Separate the sick animal away from the rest of the herd.
- Treat it last, after attending your healthy animals.
- Thoroughly and carefully wash your hands both before and after treatment—a full shower may be necessary (after treatment), depending upon the ailment.
- Walk through a disinfecting foot bath before entering and exiting the treatment area.
- Do not mix your sick horse laundry with your other clothing. It may be necessary to wash any clothing worn with the sick animal separately and immediately.

- Do not bring any sick animals into the house until first consulting the attending veterinarian.
- Stabling area and tools and equipment used in around the affected horse should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected prior to other use.

While there are only a few diseases that horse owners can contract directly from their equines, there are many diseases that we can unknowingly transfer from one location to another and from one species to another by failing to follow a good biosecurity routine.

While these biosecurity recommendations may seem like a creative way to stimulate the economy and have horse owners driving only clean cars and equipment, the threat of disease outbreak is quite real. Implementing and practicing routine biosecurity measures protects both your horses and others.

Stay up to date with current disease outbreaks and communicate with your veterinarian to identify the best policies to protect the health of your horse herd.

*A note about disinfection—simply dunking or spraying items or areas with disinfectant solution does not kill disease. In order to properly disinfect boots, trailers, equipment, and stabling, the items or areas must first be washed and the mud, manure, and other organic matter removed. Following a normal washing, the item or area should then be disinfected using either a bleach water solution or other commercially available disinfectant. Leather, wood, dirt, and other porous surfaces cannot be effectively disinfected.

**Please also note: The recommendations contained in this article are not comprehensive and do not replace the need for farm operators to consult with their veterinarian or animal health official to identify and implement best practices for their farm biosecurity.

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