

Biosecurity Tips for Horse Owners

“Bio” means life, and “security” means protection. As a horse owner, following good biosecurity practices is one of the most important things you can do to prevent your horses from catching contagious diseases. The goal with biosecurity is to reduce the chance that viruses, bacteria, or other germs will be carried to or from your property or transmitted from horse to horse within your property. Other horses, people, insects, trailers, and equipment can all carry germs and diseases from one place to another.

By making good biosecurity a habit on the road and at home, you’ll help keep your horses healthy. Here are some simple steps you can take to protect them.

Vaccination and General Health

Talk to your veterinarian about your horses and their particular needs. A veterinarian can help you maintain your horses’ good health and recommend an appropriate vaccination program. Vaccination is an important part of protecting your horses from infectious disease. It is generally recommended that all horses on the premises be vaccinated, with the goal of protecting the herd. Typically, horses receive a “core” group of vaccines and then, depending on specific risk factors (such as age, environment, geographic location, and amount of travel), additional vaccines may be suggested.



Leaving the Farm

Horses that leave the farm to compete, breed, train, or go to a veterinary hospital can be exposed to all kinds of disease agents. When leaving the farm, don’t ship your horses with horses from other farms. Use your own trailer whenever possible. If you must use someone else’s trailer, be sure to clean and disinfect it before loading your horse. If you can “smell horse” in the empty trailer, it has not been cleaned and disinfected well enough.

Once you arrive at your destination, don’t let your horse touch other horses, especially nose to nose. Avoid sharing equipment (such as buckets, brushes, sponges, or hoses) with horses from other farms, and never reuse needles or syringes for injections. Also, never put the end of a shared hose in your horse’s water bucket. Wipe the hose end with a disinfectant wipe, hold the hose above the water bucket, and then fill the bucket. If you don’t have a disinfectant wipe, holding the hose above the bucket will still help protect your horse.

Don’t hand-graze your horse where other horses have recently grazed. If you touch other horses, wash your hands with soap and water, and dry them well. Use disinfectant wipes or hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available. Don’t let strangers pet your horse, especially if they’ve visited other countries within the last 2 weeks.

Returning to the Farm

When you and your horses return home, you need to protect those that didn’t travel from being exposed to new germs. Clean and disinfect tack, boots, equipment, and grooming supplies before coming back. Make sure to clean off dirt and manure before disinfecting. Disinfectant wipes or a disinfectant-dampened cloth work well for tack, and shoes can be sprayed with disinfectant. You should also shower, blow your nose (germs can survive a long time in nasal secretions), and put on clean clothes and shoes upon your return.

It is best to keep returning horses separate from your other horses for at least 2 weeks. Avoid any nose-to-nose touching, including through holes or gaps in stall walls. When doing feeding and chores, work with the returning horses last, wear boots and coveralls, and remove them before working with your other horses. And finally, don’t forget to wash your hands.



Don't Carry Germs Home

You can accidentally carry germs home to your horses on your clothes and shoes. To avoid doing this, keep a pair of shoes or boots that you only use for visiting other places with horses. If your shoes can't be washed and disinfected, wear plastic shoe covers; plastic sleeves from newspapers work well. If you are working with horses on another farm, wear coveralls or plan to change your clothes before working again on your farm. If there are farms you visit all the time and you can't always change clothes or clean your shoes, be sure their vaccination and biosecurity habits are as good as your own.

On Your Farm

Even horses that never travel need protection with good biosecurity at home. Keep visitors from bringing germs to your farm. When visitors arrive, have them park away from the horse area of your property. If the farrier or veterinarian needs to park closer, be sure their tires and shoes have been cleaned and disinfected.

Ask visitors to wear clean shoes and clothes. Provide plastic shoe covers, or have them brush dirt off their shoes and then spray the shoes with a disinfectant. If you have many visitors, such as a farm tour, use a footbath when they enter and leave your farm.

Making a Footbath

To make a footbath, you will need:

1. A low plastic pan or bin, wide enough to fit an adult's foot and shallow enough to step into easily.
2. A plastic doormat (the "fake grass" mats work well).
3. A disinfectant that works well for most situations, such as Tek-trol or One Stroke Environ.
4. Water.

Mix the disinfectant with water according to the label instructions. Put the doormat in the plastic pan. Add the disinfectant so that the bottom of the mat is wet. Ask visitors to walk through the footbath, wiping their feet on

the mat. The mat scrubs their shoes as they wipe them and applies the disinfectant. When the liquid starts to get dirty, empty it and put in new disinfectant.

Adding New Horses

Bringing a new horse home is one of the most likely ways for diseases to enter your farm. Keep new horses away from your other horses for 30 days. Use a separate set of pitchforks, grooming tools, and feed and water buckets for the new horses. Work with the isolated horse last each day, or wear boots and coveralls and take them off before working with other horses. You can keep these in a plastic, covered tub near the new horse's field, stall, or barn. Always wash your hands with soap and water, and blow your nose (to clear debris and germs) after working with the new horse.

Keep Germs From Spreading

If one of your horses is sick, isolate the animal and put up signs to keep everyone away. Make sure the sick horse can't have nose-to-nose contact with other horses. Also, put a footbath at the entrance and exit to the isolation area, and keep coveralls and boots or plastic foot covers near the sick horse isolation area. In general, you can follow the same isolation guidance as for new horses, but seek your veterinarian's advice on how long to keep the sick horse isolated and how to clean and disinfect tools and the stall after the horse is well.

Insects, birds, and rodents can all spread disease-causing germs to horses. Use effective insect and rodent control methods on your farm and when traveling. For example:

- Keep weeds and grass cut down.
- Prevent and remove pools of standing water wherever possible, including those formed from rain or wash stalls and in unused buckets, tires, and other objects.
- Use fly predators, traps, or fly spray.
- Store feed in closed, rodent- and insect-proof bins.
- Empty and clean water troughs at least weekly.

Disinfectants

Dirt and manure lower the germ-killing power of most disinfectants, so you need to remove these first. Wash the surface with soap and water, and use a brush as needed. Rinse the surface off, then apply the disinfectant and let it dry. Always follow the label instructions when mixing, using, and throwing away disinfectants. Be sure to use care and keep disinfectants away from children and animals—these products may be harmful.

When choosing a disinfectant to use in the footbath, also consider the weather. For example, frozen disinfectant in a footbath won't work.

Some common disinfectants include:

- **Household bleach**—Mix three-fourths of a cup of bleach per gallon of water (177 milliliters disinfectant to 3.8 liters of water). If you don't have a measuring cup handy, you can mix 1 part bleach to 10 parts water.
- **Spray disinfectant**—Be sure the label says that the product kills bacteria and viruses. Sprays work well on clean shoes, tack, and grooming equipment.
- **Waterless hand sanitizer**—Gels or hand wipes are easy to use for cleaning your hands at a show or after visiting other horses. Be sure to get between your fingers and under your nails.
- **One Stroke Environ and Tek-trol**—These disinfectants work when dirt and manure can't be removed. They are good choices for disinfecting trailers and tires and for use in footbaths. These usually come as concentrates and must be mixed with water before using.

Questions?

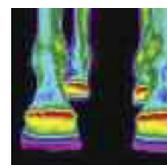
If you have questions and would like to speak with someone directly, call the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Veterinary Services office in your State. Visit our Web site at www.aphis.usda.gov/animal-health/state-offices for a listing of offices and phone numbers.

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