

# Managing a respiratory infection outbreak in a stable yard

Horses and ponies can be susceptible to a number of infections that affect the respiratory tract. The seriousness of the conditions varies: some conditions will resolve without veterinary treatment but others are life-threatening. If there is any change in your horse's breathing it is always advisable to contact your vet.

## What are the signs of respiratory disease in horses?

*Initial symptoms of a respiratory problem:*

- Coughing when eating or starting exercise or during mucking out.
- Nasal discharge - clear or mucous-like, becoming white/yellow like pus.
- Wheezing sounds.
- Reduced exercise tolerance.

*Signs of acute (rapid onset) respiratory distress:*

- Increased heart rate (normal = 30-50 beats per minute).
- Sweating.
- Flaring nostrils.
- High temperature (normal temperature = 99.5-100.5 F° / 37.5-38°C).
- Noticeable abdominal effort when breathing ('heaves').



## If horses show signs of respiratory disease:

- Call your vet for advice, providing detailed information about horses' symptoms. Take the temperature, pulse rate and respiration rate and write this information down.
- Do not exercise or feed horses until advised to do so by your vet.
- Offer horses fresh clean water at all times to prevent dehydration.
- Make sure sick horses can't come into contact with healthy horses and follow isolation procedures until your vet informs you otherwise.
- If you must look after several horses, for routine management, horses in isolation should ideally be dealt with last. This will not only help prevent the spread of disease but will make things easier in terms of hygiene and care.
- Horses in isolation should not share water or feed with other horses.
- You should always wash your hands thoroughly using soap and water after any contact with horses in isolation, even if you've been wearing disposable gloves. In certain cases you will need to use an approved disinfectant capable of killing the specific germs responsible for that disease. Your vet will be able to advise you on appropriate products.
- Boots should be cleaned thoroughly and disinfected immediately upon leaving the isolation area. The contents of the footbath should be changed regularly because the disinfectant will not work if it's dirty. Disinfectant spray can be a useful alternative to a footbath. Remember to wash your hands after use though to avoid contamination from the spray bottle.
- To prevent the spread of disease on clothing it is advisable to wear overalls that can be removed after contact with the isolated horse. Overalls should fully cover clothing. Ideally, overalls should only be used once for each horse or group of affected horses. They should be washed after use. Overalls that have been used and removed should not be used again until they have been washed. Your overalls, and any other unprotected clothing, should be washed at a temperature of at least 60°C in order to kill any harmful germs.



- It is vital to clean items thoroughly before disinfecting them because disinfectants won't work on dirty surfaces. Similarly, products such as alcohol hand gels will only work on clean hands.
- All dung and waste material from sick horses must be disposed of carefully. Your vet will be able to give you advice.
- Stables and, if possible, field shelters, should be cleaned out and disinfected between horses. You must disinfect them after a horse has been ill, along with other equipment (e.g. water troughs, buckets, feed containers). Ideally any fencing and exercise areas that sick horses may have had direct contact with should also be disinfected if possible. Ask your vet for advice about what additional measures you should take.
- Vehicles can spread disease, whether it's your lorry, trailer or car. Lorries and trailers should have all dung and dirty bedding removed, and their floor and walls disinfected if sick horses have been transported inside.
- Have one set of equipment (e.g. grooming, feed and water buckets or troughs, mucking out equipment) for each ill horse until the illness is identified and subsequent action has been taken.
- Follow your vet's advice and complete all courses of medication even if horses appear better.
  - Never use a hypodermic needle on more than one animal and ensure that all materials used to treat sick and injured animals are disposed of correctly (e.g. cotton wool).
- Once horses have been given the all-clear by the vet, make sure all equipment and housing is thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.
- Make sure other owners on the yard know what's happening so that they can protect their own horses from the disease.
- Dogs and cats, like us, can spread disease from one horse to another. Keep an eye on them and make sure they stay away from sick horses. Other animals (poultry, livestock) should be kept away from isolated horses.



### How can I prevent horses contracting respiratory infections?

- Isolate any new arrival into a stable yard for 3 weeks
- Maintain good ventilation and dust-free regimens in stables
- Make sure all horses in a stable yard, including your own, are correctly vaccinated

