

Infectious Disease

27 March 2017



Harness Racing Victoria (HRV) has an interest and responsibility for the welfare of all horses and the protection of the horse industry against infectious and contagious disease threats.

What diseases does this notice refer to?

This notice relates to all equine infectious diseases including those listed as notifiable by Agriculture Victoria and other contagious diseases not listed as notifiable to Agriculture Victoria yet have the potential to be spread between horses.

Important examples of infectious disease threats include those that Australia is currently free from (known as exotic diseases) such as Equine Influenza. Other diseases such as Hendra, that to date, has only occurred in Queensland and NSW, Strangles, Equine Herpes Virus-1 and Salmonellosis that already occur in Victoria are important notifiable diseases. Contagious diseases that are not listed as notifiable diseases to Agriculture Victoria and do not cause severe disease or death may still be reportable to HRV if they have significant potential to spread between horses by direct contact or via contact with contaminated tack, for example fungal skin disease ('ringworm').

What to do if you suspect an infectious disease in a horse or horses?

Early detection of infectious disease is extremely important. If a trainer, owner or other industry participant suspects an infectious disease in a horse or horses they are advised to isolate the sick horse(s), implement standard procedures for horse hygiene, stop horse movement on and off the property and promptly call a veterinarian. Trainers should be familiar with these recommended procedures.

HRV expects the caretakers or connections of the horse to obtain the services of a veterinarian to directly manage disease outbreaks promptly (within 24 hours), to attend the property and examine the affected horse/s and all other horses that have recently been in contact with the affected horse/s.

HRV considers unnecessary delays by caretakers or connections of a horse in obtaining the services of a veterinarian and implementing appropriate management of a disease outbreak an animal welfare concern and to potentially constitute a breach of the rules and a serious threat to the industry.

HRV participants are reminded of the following rules under the Australian Harness Racing Rules (AHRR);

AHRR Rule 90 A (2.10)

- a) A trainer is at all times responsible for the administration and conduct of his stables.
- b) A trainer is at all times responsible for the care, control and supervision of the horses in his stables.

AHRR Rule 104

- (1) If a horse contracts or is suffering any contagious disease or condition specified by the Controlling Body, the connections of the horse must immediately and in any event within 24 hours of the horse being diagnosed as suffering from the disease or condition, notify the Controlling Body in writing of that fact.
- (2) A person who fails to comply with sub rule (1) is guilty of an offence.
- (3) The Controlling Body may take such action with regard to the horse as it may determine.
- (4) Action under sub rule (3) may include ordering the destruction of the horse.

What will HRV do to assist in the investigation and management of a potential infectious disease outbreak?

Upon notification that a horse may have contracted or is suffering from any relevant contagious disease or condition in accordance with the provisions of AHRR 104, HRV Stewards require the compliance and cooperation of participants to so that they can implement and facilitate the following:

- ☐ Ensure relevant documentation is provided to the participant at the first available opportunity in relation to the infectious disease or condition, that will outline recommended guidelines and processes that will assist the participant in relation to their required management;
- ☐ Ensure that a veterinarian has been contacted so they can manage any such situation promptly (within 24 hours) and thus attend to the property to conduct adequate examination/s and any associated tests of the horse/s involved;
- ☐ HRV will provide a contact person to assist participants in their management of the infectious disease or condition;
- ☐ HRV will provide a biosecurity management spreadsheet to the participant to assist them and their Veterinarian in the management of the infectious disease or condition;
- ☐ HRV will provide any such directions or take any preventative measures that are considered necessary to attempt to confine the exposure and spread of any contagious disease or condition.

Why is adherence to the policies in this notice important?

Adherence to policies outlined in this notice will reduce the risk of an outbreak of an infectious disease that could affect animal health and welfare and have a significant economic impact on the industry.

Adherence to policies outlined in this notice is also necessary to provide confidence to trainers and owners that horses are unlikely to contract an infectious disease at a trial or race meeting.

How can trainers and owners reduce the risk of infectious disease?

Simple steps can be taken to reduce the risk of an infectious disease outbreak on your property. These are outlined in an attached fact sheet and include a quarantine or isolation area on your property where new arrivals or sick horses should be kept separate from other horses on the property until no longer potentially contagious. Implementing these steps will reduce the likelihood of introducing such a disease onto your property and reduce the chance of a horse being affected by or spreading a serious disease or one of the more common infectious viruses that cause 'coughs and colds' particularly in younger horses.

Simple steps can also be taken to reduce the risk of exposing a horse or horses to an infectious disease at a trial or race meeting. These are also outlined in the attached fact sheet.

Horses that appear unwell in any way should never be taken to a trial or race meeting under any circumstance.

What authorities need to be notified if an infectious disease outbreak is suspected and whose responsibility is it to notify such authorities?

As outlined in AHRR Rule 104 it is the responsibility of the connections of the horse to report the presence of a contagious or infectious disease to HRV.

If the infectious disease suspected or confirmed is one of the infectious diseases listed as notifiable to Agriculture Victoria then it is the veterinarian's responsibility to report to Agriculture Victoria. If specimens are submitted to a registered veterinary diagnostic laboratory, the laboratory becomes responsible for reporting to Agriculture Victoria. Agriculture Victoria will then implement management plans developed by Animal Health Australia (AHA) in conjunction with horse industry professionals and the government. These plans attempt to prevent the introduction and the spread if an exotic disease was introduced. The key plan in disease prevention is the Australian Emergency Veterinary Plan (AUSVETPLAN). Serious exotic diseases are addressed in this plan, which guides the control and management of an emergency disease outbreak.

Trainers are advised of the following important expectations and requirements

HRV appreciates that investigations into potential infectious disease cases and the subsequent management that is required may be challenging situations for industry participants and veterinarians to manage. However, HRV expects the full co-operation and compliance of industry participants in the management of disease outbreaks, which includes prompt veterinary intervention and thorough diagnostic investigation.

Appropriate diagnostic testing, with detailed treatment and management plans must be implemented. While diagnostic testing for endemic infectious diseases may incur a cost to the owner/s of the horse, there are no Government charges for exotic animal disease investigations.

In the event of an infectious disease outbreak, HRV requires that any person/s treating any horse/s maintain adequate and sufficient records in a spreadsheet format, and thus be able to provide, as directed, ongoing treatment reports on a regular basis. As outlined above, HRV will provide a spreadsheet template to assist participants in the management of any infectious disease via email or hard copy.

Harness Racing participants in Victoria seeking any information in relation to this notice are encouraged to contact Brent Fisher at the HRV Integrity Department on (03) 8378 0287

Attached fact sheets for trainers:

We recommend that these fact sheets are kept on hand or displayed in your stables

1. 10 Simple Steps to reduce the risk of infectious disease in horses and How to Disinfect
2. Infectious disease signs to watch out for (includes important phone numbers)
3. Normal vital signs for horses at rest

Other useful information available for download from Agriculture Victoria <http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/>

1. List of diseases that are notifiable to Agriculture Victoria (AG0753)
2. Information on the control of Strangles in horses (AG1363)
3. Mosquito borne diseases of horses (AG1440)
4. <http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/animal-diseases/horses/information-of-the-control-of-strangles-in-horses>
5. Equine Bio-security

10 Simple Steps to reduce the risk of infectious disease in horses

1. **Train all staff** in disease prevention, identification and hygiene procedures. Be well set up for staff, visitors and professionals (veterinarians, farriers and dentist) to wash and disinfect their hands and any equipment used on horses. You and your staff should wash their hands between handling groups of horses.
2. **Regularly clean and disinfect** stables, equipment and transport vehicles. A surface must be clean for a disinfectant to work. Remove as much dirt, manure and urine as possible before disinfecting. Clean and disinfect equipment such as bits, twitches and stomach tubes between use on different horses.
3. **Control insects and rodents** by ensuring good draining and manure management. Keep feed in rodent-proof storage containers, limit spots for pests to breed and hide, and empty the manure pit regularly.
4. **Vaccinate horses and keep records** for diseases like tetanus and strangles. Verify proof of vaccination for new arrivals onto your property.
5. **Isolate new arrivals** for 2 weeks or introduce only horses from properties with a known high health status. Be cautious if horses have come from a sales complex, have used commercial or shared horse transport vehicles or have originated from properties with less than ideal standards of health status and hygiene. Be aware that a horse may be carrying an infectious disease, for example Strangles, without showing any signs. Monitor new arrivals twice daily for signs of disease.
6. **Isolate horses at the first sign of sickness** until contagious disease has been ruled out. Keep all equipment used on isolated horses separate. Handle sick horses last. Use separate clothing or coveralls and boots when handling sick horses.
7. Do not move sick horses except for veterinary treatment or under veterinary supervision.
8. **Take precautions when at an event such as a trial or race meeting.** Avoid direct nose to nose contact with other horses and avoid the use of communal water troughs. Do not share buckets, tack or grooming equipment with horses from other stables. If other people touch your horse ensure they have washed their hands. Ideally, on returning home clean and disinfect your truck/float, tack and other equipment.
9. **Be familiar with normal vital signs for horses.** Monitor horses twice daily for feed and water intake, attitude and manure. Check the rectal temperature of any horses that do not display normal signs of health.
10. **Increase perimeter security** by keeping boundary fences in good condition. Double fences and tree plantations provide an excellent barrier. Electric fencing will not completely eliminate nose to nose contact with neighbour's horses but it can deter horses if other options are not available.

“Prevention is better than cure”

Acknowledgement:

This document was adapted from “Biosecurity for Horses-The Glove box Guide” which is based on “Horse Alert Victoria” and is available for download

www.pir.sa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf.../HorseBiosecurity_GloveboxGuide_09.pdf

How to Disinfect

There are three steps in order for this process to be effective:

Step 1 – Remove Loose Material

Surfaces must first be cleaned in order for disinfectants to be effective. Ensure all manure and dirt is brushed off the surface.

Step 2 – Clean the item or surface

Wash the item or surface with warm soapy water, rinse thoroughly and dry.

Step Three – Disinfect

Tack can be wiped with a disinfectant wipe or can be sprayed with disinfectant. Horse Transport vehicles and floors of stables can be sprayed with disinfectant made up in a spray bottle. Weed sprayers are ideal for this use on larger areas.

Using Disinfectants

Always wear gloves when mixing up disinfectants, read manufacturer's instructions and be careful with your clothes and equipment.

Bleach (any bleaching agent containing hypochlorite) – Mixing one part bleach to 10 parts water is a cost effective way to disinfect buckets, stable forks and shovels, and grooming equipment.

Spray Disinfectants – Any quaternary Ammonium Compound can be used. Make sure you mix up as per instructions on label. These are good for disinfecting inside of transport vehicles and tyres, stable floors and walls, and stable equipment. Some are suitable for footbaths.

Anti-bacterial/Alcohol Wipes – These are readily available in all supermarkets and chemists. Make sure they kill both virus and bacteria. Wipes are quick and effective for wiping over tack.

Disinfecting hands

Clean skin with soap and water.

Waterless Antibacterial Hand Gels –available in gel or wipes at most supermarkets and chemists.

Chlorhexidine – Any hand wash that has chlorhexidine compound used in most hospitals and veterinary surgeries.

EMERGENCY INFECTIOUS DISEASE SIGNS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Lethargy, dullness, loss of appetite or depression
Increased body temperature (above 38.5°C)
Dark pink or red gum colour
Profuse diarrhoea
Frequent dry, hacking cough
Abnormal nasal discharge
Swellings around the throat and/or under the jaw
Laboured breathing, frothy and/or blood stained nasal discharge
Neurological (nervous system signs) such as wobbly gait or lack of coordination
Rapid onset of illness or rapid deterioration
Rapid spread of signs and symptoms throughout the stable
A high number of sick horses
Sudden unexplained death
Blisters, ulcers or erosions around the mouth or feet

Be aware. Never assume that an exotic or reportable disease will not affect you.

**Be alert. Every day, routinely assess and compare current state of health of horses and
behaviour from what you know is normal.**

Do not take a sick horse to a trial or race meeting.

GET IMMEDIATE ADVICE-CALL YOUR VET IMMEDIATELY

Important phone numbers

Private Veterinarian.....office

.....mobile

Harness racing Victoria: (03) 8378 0200

Agriculture Victoria to contact your District Veterinary Officer: 136186

Animal Disease Watch Hotline: 1800675888

NORMAL VITAL SIGNS FOR HORSES AT REST

Rectal temperature 37.0-38.4°C

Heart rate 28-40 beats/minute

Breathing 8-16 breaths/minute

Gum colour- pale pink, moist, with colour returning in less than 2 seconds after pressing on the gum with a finger (known as capillary refill time).

At least 7-8 piles of formed manure every day.

Drinking at least 25 litres of water per day (more if water losses via sweating during exercise).

Normal stance, alert and normal general behaviour.