



Best Practices for Owners to Minimize Equine Disease While Traveling

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Introduction

With today's disease surveillance programs and modern communication technology, it seems there is always a stream of alerts for equine disease occurrences across the USA. For those that stick close to home with their horses, an outbreak of Eastern Equine Encephalitis in Florida might not be a concern for Southwestern New Mexico. However, for those that travel to competitions where there is congregation of horses from several states across the nation, it is important that owners be aware and employ good practices to minimize the risk of infection to their horses. There are two basic components to this strategy. One is routine vaccination, and the second is using good biosecurity practices. This brief article provides a simple overview of those practices and a list of recommended readings for those interested in "digging deeper" into the subject.

Your Vaccination Program

The vaccines used in your annual or routine vaccination program should be determined after consultation with your veterinarian after discussing the risks of exposure to various diseases. Your veterinarian can help you develop a sound program that fits you and your horse's individual circumstances. Prior to that discussion, I suggest you review the current recommendations provided by the American Association of Equine Practitioners. These recommendations cover core vaccinations and risk-based vaccine recommendations for adult horses (i.e., those over one year of age) and foals less than one year age from vaccinated or unvaccinated mares. These are available at:

<https://aaep.org/guidelines/vaccination-guidelines>

Basic Biosecurity Practices

While vaccination may be our best tool to prevent disease once exposure to a pathogen has occurred, other biosecurity practices focus on steps to minimize the horse's risk of exposure to a pathogen. The BIOSECURITY acronym below offers a few key biosecurity practices to employ when traveling to competitions with horses. To learn more biosecurity measures that you may employ on your specific

horse operation or management situation, readers are encouraged to review the resources available from the Equine Disease Communication Center at: <https://equinediseasecc.org/biosecurity>

Begin before you travel. Make sure that your horses are current on vaccinations, deworming, and are healthy. Travelling long distances in a trailer and stalling in an unfamiliar venue can impose stress which may lead to disease progression in horses that have an underlying health issue. You don't want to be the one that brought the "sick horse" to the event that may infect other horses.

Inspect the event facilities upon arrival and avoid potential pitfalls. Avoid community water troughs, grazing areas, and limit unsupervised turn out in round pens, paddocks, or other areas that may not be routinely cleaned or disinfected at the event facility.

Observe other horses around your horse's environment (see E below) for any potential signs of disease (coughing, sneezing, nasal discharge, etc.). If persistent symptoms seem to indicate that a horse may be ill, it is appropriate to bring it to the attention of the event management. They can then discuss the concern with the other horse's owners and determine if further veterinary examination or isolation of the suspect horse is warranted.

Shipping the horse: Be sure that there is adequate ventilation in the trailer, and tie the horse loosely, yet safely, in the trailer so they have some ability to move their head and neck during transport. Tying a horse's head up high in the trailer can have a negative impact on respiratory health. Also, do not ship the horse with other horses of unknown health status. Communicate with your traveling partners before hand to ensure that their horses are current on health care practices.

Environment: While some smaller events may allow you to select your own stalls, many larger venues assign stalls prior to your arrival. Be sure to inspect the stalls before you unload the horses to ensure that they are clean. If you have concerns, visit with event managers to express your concern, and see if you can find a suitable alternative. Also, try to stall with the horses you travelled with to minimize commingling at the stall area. If possible, make sure there is adequate ventilation in the stall area, and bringing a fan along to the event can help keep air moving.

Cleanliness: This goes hand in hand with the environment. For example, if there is no "clean" stall alternative in the situation above. You may have to strip and re-bed the stall. Also, a good wipe-down, or spray with a 2-quart garden pump sprayer from your traveling kit, with a freshly mixed 10% bleach water solution is better than no attempt to clean and remove potential contaminants.

Use your own supplies and equipment. This includes any item that comes in contact with your horse. Bits, buckets, feeders, grooming tools, etc. all have the potential to expose your horse to infectious agents from other horses. If you use a "community" water hose at the event, make sure that is clean and do not allow the hose to touch the water bucket as you fill it.

Restrict others from touching your horse, especially around the eyes, nose, and mouth. You do not know if the horse two stall alleys over sneezed on this person's hands before they came by to rub your horse's nose.

Isolate your horses returning from competition from the rest of the horses at home for 14 days, and monitor for clinical signs of disease, before allowing them to commingle.

Temperature: Make sure you carry a thermometer, or two, in your first aid travel kit to monitor your horse's temperature while away from home. A fever is often one of the first symptoms observed with infection, and it is best to know the actual temperature rather than "guesstimating" if a horse has a fever.

You can make a difference by practicing good biosecurity. As the old adage states, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

References

AAEP Vaccination Guidelines. 2020. Retrieved February 18, 2022, from:

<https://aaep.org/guidelines/vaccination-guidelines>

Equine Disease Communication Center. What is Biosecurity? 2022. Retrieved February 18, 2022, from:

<https://equinediseasecc.org/biosecurity>

Calendar of Events

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| March 7 - 11 | SPRING BREAK – NMSU Students |
| March 11-12 | Southwest Beef Symposium, Quay County Fairgrounds
Tucumcari, NM (nmbeef.nmsu.edu) to register |
| March 12 | 61 st Annual Tucumcari Bull Sale - 1pm
Rex Kirksey Ag Science Center, Tucumcari, NM |
| March 22 | Otero County BQA Training Day, Otero County Fairgrounds
Alamogordo, NM |
| March 29-31 | Luna County Artificial Insemination School |

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