

Biosecurity for the traveling show horse

Biosecurity is defined as all practices intended to prevent introduction and spread of infectious (contagious) diseases within a group of horses. The term "biosecurity" is often times used interchangeably with "infectious disease control." Thus, simply put, it means simple routines and conscientious practices which can guard your horse against a potentially fatal disease. Application of the concepts of biosecurity is important at every level of the horse industry. Probably the most documented guidelines are those used in equine veterinary hospitals, but the basic concepts can be modified to pertain to any venue that horses congregate from multiple sites.



Horse shows and events are prime places for a horse to catch an infectious disease. In recent years there have been reports of disease outbreaks at horse shows, thus simple measures to protect your horse could mean the difference between coming home with a blue ribbon or a sick horse. Contagious diseases significantly endanger the well-being of horses in addition to having potentially devastating financial and emotional effects. Horses that travel are exposed to conditions outside the normal including enclosed spaces, poor ventilation, fluctuations in ambient temperatures and co-mingling of a large number of horses from different areas, states or countries. In addition to abnormal conditions, horses that travel are stressed resulting in a decrease in immunity making them likely to develop clinical disease when exposed to common pathogens (germs).

There are simple steps deemed the ABCD's of biosecurity for the traveling show horse that will help to assure the health of your horse is not compromised. These steps involve proper health care, disinfection and an awareness of day-to-day hygiene. "A" stands for appropriate health care, which starts at home. This refers to establishing the best practices to maintain the general health of your horse and includes appropriate vaccinations, proper deworming, a suitable diet and proper exercise. The goal is to keep the immune system healthy. An appropriate vaccination schedule can be discussed with your veterinarian who will know of the possible contagious diseases in your area and the area you are traveling to.

"B" refers to the best form of transportation for the horse. The ideal means to transport your horse is in a properly cleaned and disinfected trailer, preferably your own. If commercial transportation is the only way you can ship your horse, research the company and ship only with a company that appropriately cleans and disinfects the trailer. If you can "smell horse" in the empty trailer then it has not been cleaned and disinfected properly. It is best not to ship with other horses of unknown health status. Good ventilation when shipping is important as is tying the horse loosely in the trailer. Research has shown that tying a horse's head up makes it more prone to respiratory disease because it is harder for the horse to clear the airways of debris and mucus.

"C" refers to cleanliness especially of the show grounds. Stalls should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected between uses either by the event coordinator or by the participants. Prior to putting your horse into the stall, note if the stall has been cleaned. If there is old bedding or feed material in the stall, you know it has



not been properly cleaned and disinfected. There are times when it is nearly impossible to appropriately clean and disinfect a stall because the material the stall is made out of is porous (i.e. wood) and the floor is dirt. In a perfect world the best cleaning methods to remove all bedding, scrub the walls and floor with a detergent, rinse, allow walls to dry, and then spray with a disinfectant. The literature has shown that physically scrubbing surfaces with soap and water followed by rinsing removes about 90-95% of bacteria and viruses. Unfortunately this is not practical thus a modification is to remove all of the old bedding and feed material and spray the surfaces with a disinfectant. If there is a large amount of organic material (dirt, fecal matter) on the walls, removal with soap and water is recommended prior to applying the disinfectant. A garden pump sprayer makes a good way to carry and apply disinfectants (photo at right). In this scenario an appropriate disinfectant is one that is effective even in the presence of organic material such as a "phenol" compound. These disinfectants can be recognized by "-phenol" or "-phenate" at the end of the chemical name on the label (examples include One-Stroke Environ® or Tek-trol®). Diluted bleach (8 ounces bleach to 1 gallon of water) is an inexpensive disinfectant but it works best on a surface that has been thoroughly cleaned.

"D" refers to day-to-day hygiene. This refers to many day to day activities at the show that put your horse at risk for exposure to germs. Closed or heated show grounds may be comfortable for you but usually result in poor ventilation and exposure of your horse to temperature fluctuations. Good ventilation and

temperature control can help to reduce stress on the respiratory tract and circulation of germs/pathogens. Although it is impossible to restrict traffic around your horse, it is possible to limit direct contact to only essential people. Don't let unfamiliar people pet or handle your horse because they may have just been touching another horse that was sick. Alcohol based hand sanitizers or disinfectant wipes are an effective means to reduce the amount of germs on your hands. Do not loan or borrow equipment including buckets, towels, brushes and mucking equipment. If you need to borrow equipment appropriately disinfect it prior to using it on your horse. Avoid taking your horse to communal water or grazing areas. Communal water hoses can be a source of contamination, thus bring your own hose. In general do not submerge the end of the hose into the bucket because the end could be a potential way to transmit germs from bucket to bucket. Monitor your horse's temperature several times a day. Be aware of other horses stalled near your horse. Listen for coughing and observe for nasal discharge because this may be a sign of an infectious disease. Don't let your horse touch other horses especially nose to nose because this is a common way to spread contagious organisms. Wearing rubber soled shoes allows for proper disinfection of your footwear. Consider keeping rubber slip-ons to wear only when around your horse thus preventing tracking of germs from the show grounds to your horse.

Biosecurity does not stop once you leave the show grounds. Before leaving the show grounds clean and disinfect tack, boots, equipment and grooming supplies. Once at home change your clothes and boots prior to handling resident horses. Isolate the returning horse from your resident horses for 14 days and monitor for clinical signs of an infectious disease. Appropriate biosecurity is important for the traveling show horse. As the saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.