

Equine Influenza ('FLU')

What is it and what are the clinical signs?

Equine flu is an infectious disease which affects the upper respiratory tract of horses. There have been many outbreaks in the UK in 2019 & horseracing was halted in response to flu in February. The highest number of flu cases have been reported in June/July and they are still happening.

Clinical signs usually appear within 1–5 days of exposure to the flu virus and they can last for 3–6 weeks. Signs can include a high temperature, cough, nasal discharge, enlarged glands (under the lower jaw), conjunctivitis, lethargy, loss of appetite and swelling of the lower limbs.

How is it spread?

Like human flu, equine flu is very contagious. It spreads rapidly with the virus being released into the atmosphere as droplets by infected animals coughing. The virus can spread over longer distances than some other diseases, so any infected animal needs to be isolated by 100m distance to reduce the risk of airborne spread.

The flu virus can also live on surfaces, objects, tools and peoples' clothing. Cleaning or disinfecting your equipment, washing or disinfecting your hands and changing clothing between yards can help to manage the risk of spread.

What do I do if I think there may be flu on one of my yards?

Notify the yard manager straight away if you have any concerns (any of the clinical signs above and suggest that they call their vet. A special Equine Influenza Surveillance Programme at the Animal Health Trust (AHT) provides a laboratory testing service allowing all vets to send in swabs taken from horses with suspected flu and confirm not only if flu is present, but also which strain is responsible. It is crucial that yards follow the advice of vets to minimise the risks associated with this virus.

Vaccination

Vaccination is crucial for flu. The disease is often introduced on to a premises by a non vaccinated horse. Horses should be vaccinated (complete primary course) and receive a booster at least annually. At the moment, twice yearly is recommended to offer the best protection. If over 70% of the country's horses were vaccinated, flu would not be able to get a foothold because of a process called "herd immunity" and this is why it is very important that ALL horses are vaccinated, whether or not they go anywhere. Current vaccines are effective, despite what you may hear to the contrary.



At the moment only 40% of the UK's horses are vaccinated, are your clients included in this number? Make sure that neither they nor you, are contributing to the spread of this disease.

Prevention

Watch our handy video for practical tips!

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