

Biosecurity Challenges at Equine Events

Equine events pose unique risks for disease introduction and spread. The frequency and number of animals and humans moving around a show grounds, the commingling of horses of unknown health status, the often close stabling of animals and the sometimes inadequate or non-existent isolation areas for sick animals, all increase challenges for disease control.

1. **Commingling Horses of Unknown Health Status:**

Horses, often with an unknown health status, are moved from their home premises and travel to an equine event, where they commingle on one premises. Some owners may have vaccinated their horses to protect them against common infectious disease agents, while others have not. The horses may all appear healthy as they unload from the trailer on the event grounds, however, some may be incubating or shedding a disease agent. Unfortunately, without a requirement for complete health exams and diagnostic testing, the health status of all the horses arriving on the event grounds will remain a mystery.



During equine events, horses commingle in confined spaces for the purpose of competition, exercise or stabling. Without a complete physical examination and diagnostic testing, the health status of these horses remains unknown. There is potential for an apparently healthy horse to be incubating and possibly shedding a disease agent.

2. Stabling of Animals in Close Proximity: Horses participating in multi-day equine events are often housed in close quarters in barns and stables for extended periods of time with limited access to paddocks or pastures. Some events, such as fairs and exhibitions, may house multiple types of animals under one roof. Close stabling increases the risk of circulating pathogens and disease transmission.

3. Animal and Human Movement: Typically, event officials, exhibitors, spectators and vendors move freely around the venue grounds, interacting with numerous other people, animals and objects. These unrestricted movements and interactions may inadvertently increase the risks for infectious pathogen introduction and spread during an event.



Horses and humans can quickly disseminate a disease pathogen around the event grounds when movements and interactions are unrestricted.

4. Inadequate or Non-existent Isolation Areas: Most equine event grounds and facility designs allow exhibitors easy, direct access to competition/exhibition areas. Stabling areas away from the main traffic routes of the event are limited and an area for adequate isolation of sick horses may not be immediately available when needed.