

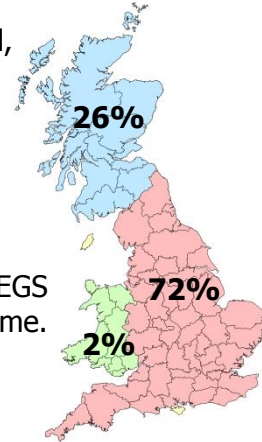
We would like to thank everyone who participated in this feasibility study, making it a huge success. The results have already helped us to improve the study design for the forthcoming EGS vaccine trial.



In 2013, the Animal Health Trust conducted a study to determine the feasibility of conducting a nationwide field vaccine trial for Equine Grass Sickness (EGS). Horse owners who had reported at least one case to the EGS Surveillance Scheme in the last 5 years were invited to take part. The aims of the study were to:

- 1** Identify premises that would be eligible to take part in the vaccine trial
- 2** Explore owners' opinions about the vaccine trial
- 3** Identify any concerns owners might have about participating in the vaccine trial

Of the 229 owners contacted, 51% completed the questionnaire, most of whom were from England.



79% of owners kept their horses/ponies on the same premises since reporting an EGS case to the surveillance scheme.

Most owners kept their horses/ponies at home or on rented premises or pasture.

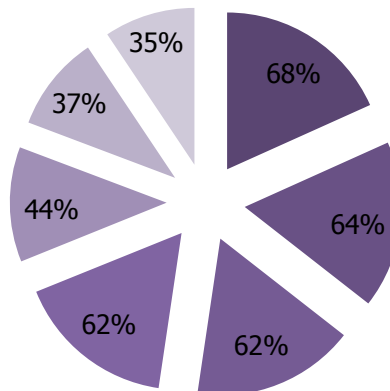
Owners' Experience of Equine Grass Sickness

To help us identify premises that would be eligible to take part in the vaccine trial, we asked owners about recent cases of EGS and factors which may influence the risk of EGS.

- ◆ Only one-third of premises had experienced cases of EGS in the previous two years
 - ◆ 15% of these EGS-affected premises had more than one EGS case in the previous two years

The vast majority of owners implemented preventive management strategies in order to reduce the risk of EGS, the most common of which are shown in the chart:

Preventive measures to reduce the risk of EGS



- Provide supplementary forage
- Avoid sudden feed changes
- Avoid overuse of Ivermectin anthelmintics
- Hand removal of faeces NOT mechanical
- Minimise soil disturbance/exposure
- Avoid stressful incidents
- Prioritise preventive measures at high-risk times of year

98% of owners believe the nationwide EGS vaccine trial is very important for both equine veterinary research and the UK horse population.

We also surveyed veterinary surgeons about the EGS vaccine trial

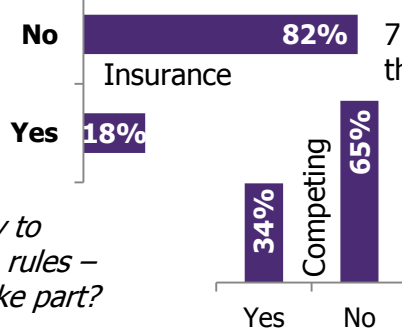
- ◆ 73% of vet practices had attended cases of EGS in the previous two years
- ◆ **85%** of vets believe the EGS vaccine trial is important or very important to the UK horse population
- ◆ **99%** of vets would take part in the EGS vaccine trial if one of their clients wanted to enrol
- ◆ **86%** of vets would enrol their own horse or pony in the EGS vaccine trial

Participation in the EGS vaccine trial

To help us identify which factors might influence whether or not owners would wish to take part, we asked about several aspects of participation in the vaccine trial.

Insurance and competing

Owners would be required to inform their insurance company that their horse was enrolled in trial – would this influence their decision about whether to take part?



75% of owners had some or all of their horses/ponies insured

- ◆ only 18% of these owners indicated that insurance implications would affect their decision about taking part

Enrolment in the trial might affect eligibility to complete horses under certain competition rules – would this influence owners' decision to take part?

57% of owners competed their horses/ponies

- ◆ 34% of these owners indicated that competition rules would affect their decision about taking part



Methods for gathering information

It will be vital to gather information about the management and health of enrolled horses and ponies throughout the EGS vaccine trial.

- ◆ **91%** of owners would be willing to provide information about their horse at regular intervals during the trial by completing telephone interviews with the trial research staff
 - ◆ 7% of owners would prefer to provide this information online or via postal questionnaires
- ◆ **96%** of owners indicated that it would be feasible for them to undertake daily checks of their horse for one week following every injection, recording their findings on standardised forms
 - ◆ 14% of these owners felt they would require training from their vet to allow them to be confident in performing the post-injection daily checks



Veterinary visits and vaccine administration

Enrolled horses will receive six scheduled EGS vaccine trial vet visits. Half of the horses will receive Clostridium botulinum type C vaccination and the other half will receive inactive placebo injections. Owners and vets would not know which treatment each horse was receiving until after the trial was completed.

- ◆ **82%** of owners would be able to attend the required number of veterinary visits during normal working hours
 - ◆ a further 15% would always have someone available to attend vet visits on their behalf
- ◆ **19%** of owners considered that knowing their horse or pony may receive an inactive placebo injection instead of the *C. botulinum* type C vaccine would influence their decision-making about taking part

- ◆ **74%** of owners indicated they would be willing to participate in a nationwide vaccine trial for EGS
 - ◆ the most common reasons for not wishing to take part were owner concerns regarding vaccine safety, too great a time commitment being required and owning a needle shy horse
- ◆ **94%** of owners would have some or all of their horses and ponies routinely vaccinated if a vaccine against EGS was available

Nationwide EGS vaccine trial

Following the successful completion of a small pilot vaccine trial in 2013, the full-scale nationwide EGS vaccine trial will be launched in early 2014. The trial will recruit 1100 horses for a two year period from premises previously affected with a high incidence of EGS. Demonstration of reduced disease incidence in vaccinated horses would provide a major breakthrough in the prevention of EGS. If you are interested in finding out more about the vaccine trial, and how you can take part, please visit:

www.equinegrasssickness.co.uk or email: equinegrasssickness@aht.org.uk