



What to do with equine flu

Steps to take when there is a case in your area or on your yard



Animal Health Trust

EQUIFLUNET.ORG.UK

Flu is a very contagious virus and is transmitted by respiratory droplets, through direct horse-to-horse contact and coughing. One of the really notable features of flu is the very quick spread of signs in a group of horses. The virus can spread large distances in the air and this is one of the reasons why it is very important to control outbreaks as early as possible. Health care equipment and personnel (hands, clothing, etc.) can also indirectly transmit the virus.

Signs of flu can include:

- ◆ Lethargy / poor performance
- ◆ Loss of appetite
- ◆ Coughing (dry / harsh / hacking)
- ◆ Fever ($>38.5^{\circ}$)
- ◆ Nasal discharge

Seek **veterinary advice** as soon as possible if you have any concerns about your horse!

How to reduce the risk of getting flu at your yard



Is your horse vaccinated against flu?

Flu vaccination should provide your horse with good protection against flu. If your horse was to encounter flu, clinical signs will typically be much less severe, your horse would get better much faster and will also spread less virus, meaning other horses will be less likely to get sick. Vaccination should be used in conjunction with these other important preventative measures:

1. Protocol for new arrivals

Flu often occurs shortly after the arrival of new horses on to a premises and yards should have protocols in place for quarantining new arrivals for a period of time (ideally in isolation facilities for 3 weeks) before mixing them with resident horses. Before arrival, confirm the new horse is vaccinated against flu and discuss other infectious disease screening tests with your vet.

2. Good general hygiene practices

Wash your hands between handling different horses and use designated equipment for each horse. Events are good places for the circulation of infectious diseases. When away from the yard, take your own equipment, including water buckets and water. Avoid communal areas and contact with other horses. Disinfect all equipment including your trailer, when you arrive back at the yard. Closely monitor your horse too, as movement and mixing with other horses means your horse is at a higher risk of getting an infection, like flu.

3. Be prepared: Do you have yard facilities if a horse requires isolation?

A completely separate stable, ideally 25m from other horses and no shared airspace is needed. You must use separate equipment, handlers (or if this is not possible; protective clothing, gloves, separate boots and care for the isolated horse after all other horses) and muck heap when dealing with a horse in isolation. Temporary isolation can be set up by moving other horses away from the stable area/block and using it just for the isolated horse. Taping off the area and using clear signage makes others aware to avoid the area, with disinfectant foot dip and handwashing at the entrance/exit.



If flu is suspected on your yard



Call your vet and they can take a swab sample from your horse's nose and a blood sample, to confirm if your horse has flu. If your horse has been sick for a while before you call the vet, it can be harder to diagnose your horse correctly. Swabs are best taken early on in the course of the infection.

Samples can be **tested for free** through the Animal Health Trust's equine influenza surveillance scheme. This scheme is kindly supported by the Horserace Betting Levy Board. If your vet hasn't signed up to our scheme, ask them to contact us. If

you suspect another horse on your yard may also have had flu-like signs, they can also be sampled through this scheme.

Making a quick diagnosis helps to ensure that the best supportive care is given to your horse and that the correct preventative measures are put in place to stop the virus spreading. Not only will you get a diagnosis but you are also helping to monitor equine influenza activity in the UK. This allows us to study how the virus is evolving and helps us to make sure the right strains are recommended for inclusion in future horse flu vaccines.



Ultimately this means that the most effective and up-to-date vaccines are produced to protect your horse from equine flu.

Steps to take if a case of flu is confirmed at your yard

Your vet will advise you on treatment for the horse that has flu. As with human flu, rest, supportive care and anti-inflammatories are usually all that is needed and with time, your horse will feel better.

Vaccinated horses that have no signs can still carry and spread the virus, but the amount of virus shed will be at a lower level and for a shorter period of time. These clinically healthy horses should still follow the precautionary measures put in place.

Measures to prevent the spread of flu will be yard specific and tailor-made by your vet, with assistance from the Animal Health Trust's veterinary epidemiology team and will include:

- ◆ Isolation of infected horses. Infected horses will spread the virus in respiratory droplets, through coughing and can shed the virus for up to 10 days. They must be isolated until your vet advises they are no longer infected.
- ◆ All horse movements on and off the yard should be stopped.
- ◆ Monitor all horses on the yard for clinical signs and record their rectal temperature daily, it should be less than 38.5°C (your vet can advise you on how to do this if you are unsure). A rise in temperature can be an early sign of an infection.
- ◆ Booster vaccinating all in-contact horses, even if they are not yet due their annual booster, has been shown to provide horses with even more protection against flu.

If you have any further questions about flu, please visit equiflunet.org.uk or contact your vet