

Equine Influenza outbreaks

The current outbreaks of equine influenza have the potential to impact the entire equestrian industry, but there are measures that can be taken to protect horses and prevent further transmission of the disease.

By 8 February 2019, multiple outbreaks have been confirmed in Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Nigeria, Great Britain and the United States of America.

What is equine influenza?

Equine influenza is a highly contagious virus which causes respiratory disease in horses. The virus is endemic to most countries of the world and outbreaks can have severe impacts on the equine industry including restrictions on horse movement and cancelled events.

How is the disease transmitted?

Equine influenza is transmitted between horses by aerosol transmission from coughing horses. The virus can spread up to two kilometres depending on the environmental conditions. It can also be spread on clothing and yard equipment by people working with infected horses.

Horse transport is also a risk for disease transmission. Lorries and trailers in which infected horses have travelled may be contaminated with the virus and transmit the disease to others. Thorough cleaning of all equine transport vehicles must be carried out between shipments.

Equine influenza can be easily transmitted between horses that are in close contact, e.g. attending events, group training and hunting. Horses can become infected and bring the disease to their home yard and transmit the virus to other horses.

What clinical signs should I look out for?

Horses infected with the virus can develop a **fever** before showing any clinical signs of the disease. It is at this point that horses are shedding large quantities of the virus into the environment and can easily transmit the disease to others. Infected horses develop **depression, loss of appetite** and have a harsh, **dry cough**.

Infected horses can develop complications. It is not uncommon for them to suffer secondary **bacterial infections** and develop **nasal discharge**. Horses can die as a result of complications, but this is rare.

The horses most at risk are those that are unvaccinated, young, old or already compromised by other diseases e.g. Cushing's disease (PPID).

I suspect my horse has influenza. What should I do?

It is very important that horses showing the early signs of the disease are examined by a veterinarian. Since infected horses show similar clinical signs to other infectious respiratory infections, your veterinarian should take nasopharyngeal swabs and blood samples which will be sent for laboratory analysis to confirm the diagnosis.

How quickly do horses recover?

Recovery rates from equine influenza are variable and depend on the severity of the clinical signs. The respiratory tract can take between 50 to 100 days to fully recover after infection. Putting a horse back into work before it is fully recovered can jeopardise its long-term health.

How can I protect my horses?

Horses that have been vaccinated in accordance with manufacturer's instructions or FEI requirements will be very well protected against equine influenza. Although no vaccine is 100% effective, it has been clear from recent outbreaks that vaccinated horses have suffered only mild clinical signs of the disease and recovered quickly. Unvaccinated horses have been much more severely affected.

Since horses that have been in close contact with others away from home can introduce influenza to their home stables, it is vital that all horses and ponies are vaccinated, even if they don't leave their home stables. This is critical to reducing the severity of infections and viral transmission.

The FEI recommends that horses which have mixed with others are closely monitored on their return home and their rectal temperature taken twice daily. Horses that have a fever must be examined by a veterinarian as soon as possible.

All FEI horses must have an up-to-date vaccination history in their passports and checks are carried out on entry to all FEI events.

Any horse that displays any signs of illness should not leave their home yard. This also applies to any horse that has been in contact with a horse or horses that have equine influenza. Call your veterinarian.

Please visit FEI Campus for a course on [Equine Influenza: A Horse Owners Guide](#).