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# Equine Medical Advisory

## Infectious Disease Advisory for Horsemen at New York Racetracks

While control of infectious disease represents a year-round commitment for horsemen, racetrack management and regulatory officials, the first few months of the year represent a time of particular concern due to dramatic changes in weather as well as environmental conditions at racetracks and training centers that may cause stress, allow for close contact of horses, and comingling of horses of varying age and immune status. These conditions make for a “perfect storm” when dealing with many infectious diseases.

The three types of infectious disease that are most often seen at racetracks or training centers are: 1) respiratory, 2) neurological, and 3) gastrointestinal/diarrheal disease. With recent news of EHV-1 and EHM at tracks around the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states, the prevention of respiratory and neurologic disease is a high priority.

The upper airway pathogens of horses that are of most concern to horsemen at the racetrack are those that can be spread by direct nose-to-nose contact, aerosolization and indirect contact through fomites (people, equipment). Upper respiratory tract viruses include **Equine Influenza**, **EHV-4**, **EHV-1**, **Rhinovirus**, and **Rhinitis Virus A and B**. **Strangles** is a bacterium that affects the upper respiratory tract and associated lymph nodes. **Equine Herpesvirus-1** can also cause neurological disease known as Equine Herpes Myeloencephalopathy (EHM). Because EHM is spread as mentioned above and can sometimes be fatal, this is a reportable disease in New York State.

Horsemen need to recognize areas of possible contact and how to prevent disease spread. These agents, particularly the respiratory viruses, are extremely communicable and may cause quarantine or closing of a racetrack. Timely biosecurity measures used by all individuals who come into contact with horses at racetracks and training centers will often prevent these diseases or decrease the spread and transmission in the horse population.

### **The most dangerous carriers of infectious disease are the unwashed hands of individuals in direct contact with infected horses.**

Neurological disease associated with EHV1 infection, otherwise known as Equine Herpes Myeloencephalopathy (EHM), is known to cause mild to fatal neurological disease in horses of all ages, particularly horses of racing age. Because of the highly contagious nature of this disease and the degree of inter-state shipment of horses throughout the Mid-Atlantic region, EHM arguably represents the most significant threat to the racehorse population of New York racetracks. Clinical signs of EHV-1/EHM Infection may include fever, coughing, nasal discharge, variable enlargement of the lymph nodes beneath or behind the jaw, depression, loss of appetite, weakness, incoordination, wobbly gait, urine retention or dribbling, and recumbency with inability to rise.



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## **Horsemen can limit the exposure of their horses to infectious disease by implementing the Following Standard Operating Procedures:**

- Wash hands/wear clean gloves in between animals. Wear clean clothes and disinfect footwear regularly.
- Isolate sick horses to whatever degree possible, even if it means simply placing them at the far end of your barn to limit direct horse-to-horse contact.
- In the event of a finding of abnormal behavior, appetite or manure output, or clinical signs of disease (fever, nasal discharge, coughing, ataxic), consult your veterinarian immediately.
- Report sick horses to the Chief Examining Veterinarian of the racetrack immediately, especially if several horses are sick at the same time.
- Handle healthy horses before sick horses. This simple process should be practiced daily and will reduce the chance for transmission of pathogens from sick horses to healthy ones.
- If a sick horse is removed from your barn, immediately empty the stall of all organic matter, clean and disinfect the stall. Do not put another horse in that stall. Be sure to clean and disinfect the buckets, brushes, rakes, brooms, tack and any other equipment that came into direct contact with the sick horse.
- Keep a Horse Movement Log Book to include movement of individual horses into and out of the stable. Both dates of shipment and destination locations should be recorded.
- Clean and disinfect your van or trailer between trips. Disinfectant sprays are well suited to this purpose.
- Quarantine new horses on arrival to your barn for 2 to 3 weeks, if possible.
- Control public access to your stable and restrict access of all non-essential personnel.
- Control pets and pests. Observe leash laws for dogs and follow regular pest control measures (feed bags in secure containers, covering for hay bales to prevent contamination by bird droppings and use of rodent control services by licensed individuals.
- Communicate your biosecurity plan to all stable employees & visitors and post biosecurity signage where appropriate. It is particularly important for you to advise visitors who also have horses of their own or regularly come in contact with horses that you have biosecurity procedures in place.