

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Equine Influenza

What is Equine Influenza?

Equine Influenza (EI) is an acute, highly contagious viral disease which can cause rapidly spreading outbreaks of respiratory disease in horses and other equine species such as donkeys.

What are the signs of Equine Influenza?

The main clinical signs of EI in horses and donkeys are usually a deep, dry, hacking cough, a watery nasal discharge that may become cloudy or coloured and a sudden increase in temperature to between 39 and 41 degrees Celsius. Other signs can include depression, loss of appetite, laboured breathing, muscle pain and muscle stiffness.

Is Equine Influenza fatal to horses?

It is rarely fatal, but affected horses, especially performance horses, can take weeks to recover. In unusual circumstances it can cause deaths in foals, in very old animals or those already sick with other conditions.

How is Equine Influenza spread?

Usually it is spread by direct contact between horses, which is why we are restricting horse movements. It can also be spread by contaminated humans, vehicles or bedding and feed material.

Is Equine Influenza common in Australia?

EI is an exotic disease that until this outbreak has not been present in Australia. It is because we do not have EI present that we are trying to stop the disease spreading.

Do horses and donkeys recover from Equine Influenza?

EI is not a permanent disease and affected animals will generally recover and no longer be infective. This may take several weeks and so infected properties are quarantined for 30 days after the last sign of infection.

Is there any treatment for infected horses?

Just like human flu, there are no specific treatments, though some veterinary options are available in the case of severely ill or very valuable horses.

What if my horse does die of Equine Influenza?

It is unlikely that any horses will die. But a dead horse is still infective to other horses and the body must be disposed of in an approved manner.

Do carrier animals exist?

No. Once an animal has recovered and a sufficient time (30 days) has elapsed they pose no risk to other horses.

What should I do if I suspect my horse has signs of Equine Influenza?

Contact the Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888.

Do not allow your horse, or anyone in contact with the horse, to move to anywhere that other horses may be present.

Why is controlling the Equine Influenza outbreak important?

EI would have a major impact on livestock health and on the horse industry if it were to become established in the horse population. All horses will be permanently at risk of infection with subsequent impacts on competitive and domestic activities.

Can humans spread Equine Influenza?

They can do so, but it is only as physical carriers e.g. virus can be spread on contaminated clothing, skin or equipment. Humans do not get infected.

What will happen if my horse is infected?

All infected properties are being placed in quarantine to ensure that the affected animals do not move and the disease does not spread. Quarantines will be maintained until at least 30 days after the last signs were seen in affected horses.

Are infected horses killed?

Horses are not killed. Infected horses or donkeys are quarantined in order to prevent spread of the disease.

Why are movements and events being prohibited?

The primary spread of Equine Influenza is by contact between infected horses. In order to ensure spread does not occur all horse movements have been prohibited.

Can I take my horse to the local event (gymkhana, pony club, polo match) tomorrow?

No. All movement of horses has been prohibited at this time.

Can I take my horses to the track for training tomorrow?

Yes and no. If the horses are stabled at the track they can simply be trained there. If they are usually walked to the track they can still be walked there, provided they do not cross any public road. If they have to cross a public road then a permit should be sought from the Movement Control section of the State Disease Control Headquarters, telephone (02) 6391 3664. Horses may not be floated / trucked for track-work purposes.

Can Equine Influenza be spread to humans?

Transmission of EI to humans has not occurred during outbreaks of EI in horses. EI is not like bird flu in this regard.

What can I do to protect my horses from Equine Influenza?

The main thing to do is not to allow your horse, or people who handle your horse, to contact any other horses at this time. You should not use other horse owners' floats or trailers. You should make sure any feed or bedding you purchase comes from clean sources with no suspicion of infected horses being present, and is transported in vehicles which have not had contact with other horses and have been thoroughly cleaned and decontaminated with detergent or disinfectant.

Is there a vaccine available?

There are vaccines overseas but none will be available for use in the short term, especially since vaccination can complicate the diagnosis of the disease. We hope to eradicate the infection so permanent vaccination of horses in Australia will not be required.

I am likely to lose money because of this disease – can I seek compensation?

No, there is no compensation for loss of income or production. These controls are intended to benefit the whole industry, including domestic horse owners, in the long term.

Who is paying for the control activity?

All emergency animal diseases, such as Equine Influenza, are cost-shared under existing agreements between government and the relevant industries. Initial activities are undertaken by the lead agency, in this case NSW Department of Primary Industries.
