



## COVID-19 – HOW WILL THIS AFFECT ME AND MY HORSE?

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### **Can my horse get coronavirus?**

Equine Coronavirus (ECoV) is a strain of Coronavirus specific to equines, generally only the individual species of animal is affected by the specific strain of the virus however occasionally a small number of closely related species can be infected. ECoV is a member of group 2 of the mammalian Coronavirus' (there are 3 groups) and Human Coronavirus (HCoV) sits within groups 1 and 2, whilst the two forms of the virus are within the same group they are distinctly different viruses and there is currently no evidence that your horse can contract the human form of Coronavirus.

### **Tell me more about ECoV – I haven't heard of this before...**

ECoV is spread via the faeces of horses (when ingested by another horses, faecal-oral transmission) and generally affects foals more than adult horses although miniature horses and draft horses are reported to be more susceptible; with clinical signs including reduced appetite, lethargy, high temperature, diarrhoea, colic symptoms and in rare cases signs of encephalopathy (brain dysfunction) including seizures, circling and head pressing. Over two thirds of horses infected with ECoV show no clinical signs but may shed the disease for prolonged periods of time. Most horses who contract ECoV recover fully from the disease.

In Europe numbers of horses infected with ECoV are thought to be very low, however infection rates are higher on other continents including America and Asia. The virus was first isolated in horses in 1999 in America and since 2010 several cases have been reported in Europe, Japan and the US with the first reported case in the UK in December 2016 with the virus more commonly seen in the winter months.

### **Will my horse give me Coronavirus?**

ECoV is a species-specific virus meaning that it is very unlikely for it to be passed on to humans. The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has stated that there is no evidence that horses can spread ECoV to other animals or humans. You are much more likely, as a horse owner, to contract human Coronavirus from contact with people and equipment exposed to the virus.

### **Am I allowed to travel to care for my horse during the Coronavirus pandemic?**

Yes! It is essential to maintain the welfare of your horse(s) during this time however it is advisable to only undertake the travel necessary for the normal care of your horse. Travelling your horse is unlikely to be classed as essential travel unless there is a specific welfare reason, or you are travelling your horse to an equine hospital to treat a veterinary emergency.

### **Should I change what I am doing with my horse during the outbreak?**

It is advisable to put in place a documented routine for your horse and try to stick to this; not only will this be good for your horse it will enable others to take over the care of your horse should you become infected with or exposed to Coronavirus yourself. Share your horse's care plan with others such as your yard manager or family members so that they can help you with care if you become incapacitated.

In general, try to keep your horse's routine the same; horses like predictability and maintaining feeding times and type of feed will help them maintain a healthy digestive system. If you need to make changes during this time, ensure that you do this slowly and always with consideration for optimal welfare.

### **Can I turn out my horses during this time?**

Yes, turnout is vital for horses as it is part of their natural pattern of behaviour and is essential for high welfare. Try to maintain your turnout routine and wherever possible ensure that your horse is turned out with other horses for company.

### **My horse is on a livery yard – what should I consider in relation to Coronavirus?**

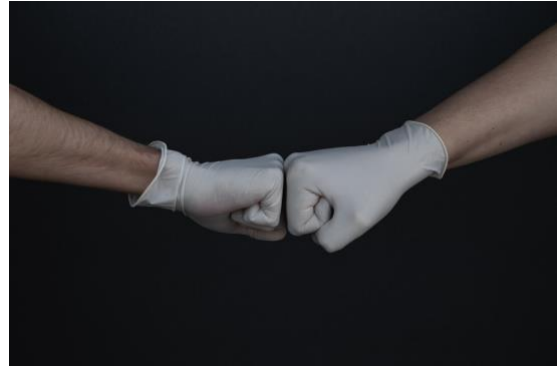
Maintain good communication with your yard manager and draw up a contingency plan for if access to your yard becomes restricted as a result of vulnerable people living at the address or if there are fewer people available to care for your horse due to self-isolation. Always respect the protocol put in place by your yard manager as it is likely to be there to keep people and horses safe and well. If you have any concerns over protocols implemented, discuss these at an early stage with your yard manager to come to an agreed way forward.



General advice for attending your yard includes:

- Working out a rota for owners to attend to their horses to avoid lots of people interacting at once
- Avoid close contact with others in tack rooms and feed rooms
- Consider whether riding is strictly necessary at this time; there is no governmental guidance on this currently however ensuring your horse is receiving turnout, you are maintaining feed times and ensuring your health and the health of others around you isn't compromised is key at this time.
- Remember if you decide to take your horse out of work you will need to reduce its feed intake.

- Why not do some in hand or liberty training at this time, you could use the time to practice groundwork exercises, clicker train your horse and teach some tricks for enrichment.
- If you share your horse with someone else try and attend the yard at different time, perhaps one person could attend in the morning and the other in the afternoon.
- Wear gloves and disinfect shared equipment after use (this includes mucking out equipment, feed scoops, buckets and specific equine equipment).
- Follow NHS and Government advice, this may change quickly as the pandemic develops.



### **Will I run out of supplies for my horse?**

You do not need to panic buy feed and bedding supplies for your horse. Horse feed and bedding suppliers are viewed as essential retailers, along with pet shops, so there is no need to stockpile items.

Make sure your horse has access to *ad lib* forage (unless advised otherwise by a veterinary surgeon), this provides the horse with plenty of roughage to mimic natural eating patterns which helps keep them healthy and can reduce the development of stereotypic behaviours.



### **Will a vet or farrier attend to my horse?**


In order to comply with government guidelines and

reduce the spread of Covid-19 many vet practices are responding to emergency and urgent call outs only. Ensure that you have a good supply of any medications your horse requires and liaise with your veterinary surgery remotely about repeat prescriptions. If you are self-isolating and your horse requires urgent veterinary attention inform your surgery as they may be able to provide an additional member of staff to hold your horse for you. More information can be found at

<https://www.bva.co.uk/media/3399/bva-guidance-for-veterinary-practices-on-covid19-march-2020.pdf>.

BEVA have advised that six monthly equine influenza vaccination is stopped and that all other influenza booster vaccinations are stopped for one month (<https://www.beva.org.uk/coronavirus>). It is hoped that with the much-reduced movement of horses at this time the impact of this in relation to risk of disease spread will be low.

The British Farriers and Blacksmiths Association have advised their members that they may travel to work to maintain equine welfare but to consider whether this is essential travel. Further information can be found at The Farriers Registration Council (<https://www.farrier-reg.gov.uk/news/coronavirus-and-farriery-guidance-to-equine-owners-and-to-registered-farriers>)



**COVID-19: farriers consider each appointment according to the following system**

**RED - Farrier Should Attend - crucial hoofcare**  
- to not attend a regular hoofcare appointments would have serious detrimental effects, promote discomfort and cause pain. This includes care of foals.

**AMBER - Farrier Should Consider Delaying Where Possible – advisory hoofcare**  
- where the timing of regular hoofcare appointments is an important factor in maintaining soundness. Consideration must be given as to whether the timescale between appointments can be extended without the equine becoming a 'red'

**GREEN – Farrier Should Not Attend - non crucial hoofcare**  
- these include equines whose hoofcare cycles can be easily extended without any long-term detrimental affects

**BRITISH FARRIERS &  
BLACKSMITHS ASSOCIATION**



The British Horse Society has some very useful advice for equestrians during Covid-19 which can be read at <https://www.bhs.org.uk/advice-and-information/coronavirus-covid-19>.

**References**

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