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Biosecurity Tips for Peak Riding Season

For some, spring in the air creates anticipation of digging in the soil or processing calves and turning to summer pastures. For horse lovers, spring is getting into peak riding season. Adventures on horseback across the nation are being planned, but what happens when serious contagious disease threatens these plans? Vesicular Stomatitis Virus hit us a short time ago, leading county fair and playday plans to major adjustments.

So, let's dig into some biosecurity tips. Simply put, biosecurity is a set of practices that are adopted to prevent and reduce the spread of disease. These practices are especially important when traveling to and from different facilities with your horse. By bringing your horse to a new barn, arena, or campsite, you're increasing their risk of disease exposure. Conversely, you can increase the risk of exposure to horses back home when returning your horse from a trip.

Before you leave, work with a veterinarian to stay up to date on vaccines. Pack cleaning supplies and disinfectants. Diluted bleach is an inexpensive disinfectant, just mix 8 oz of bleach with 1 gallon of water. Any horse with signs of fever, nasal discharge, and diarrhea should stay home.

When making plans for equine travels, use your own trailer for hauling. Avoid having your horse hauled with horses from outside your barn.

While you're away, wash your hands with soapy water as often as possible. Clean and disinfect stalls at the show or campsite. Make sure surfaces are clean and dry before applying disinfectants. Avoid sharing buckets, hay bags, grooming tools, tack, or equipment, including the water hose that fills water buckets. Disinfect the hose nozzle and hold the hose above the water bucket when filling buckets. Don't allow horses to have nose-to-nose contact or share grazing space. Limit the general public's contact with your horse and your contact with other horses.

After your event and you're home again, isolate the horse that has circulated in society for 14 days. During this time, monitor for signs of fever, nasal discharge, or diarrhea. Wash your hands, shower, and change clothes and shoes before working with horses kept at home. Disinfect buckets, hay bags, and other equipment. If possible, designate items for home use only and travel use only. Finally, clean and disinfect the horse trailer.

An ounce of prevention can help keep your horse healthy throughout the trail and show season. Vaccinating, keeping equipment and facilities clean, and avoiding contact with other horses are all good practices. Preparing and following a biosecurity plan is key to preventing disease in your horse and other horses at your barn.

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