

1. What is Equine Influenza?

A highly infectious viral respiratory disease characterized by a fever, dry hacking cough, watery nasal discharge and aching muscles and joints. With complete rest and nurturing most cases resolve in 3 to 4 weeks but it can progress to pneumonia and death.

2. How can my horse/pony catch it?

Like other forms of influenza the main source of infection is by airborne spread of the virus. When an infected horse coughs, vast quantities of the virus are released into the atmosphere and spread up to 20 metres over a wide area.

3. Why do I need to vaccinate my horse/pony?

Vaccination (sometimes called immunization) stimulates the body's immune system to produce protecting antibodies against the virus which can prevent the infection altogether or significantly reduce the signs and the amount of virus shed into the atmosphere to infect other horses enabling a speedier return to work.

4. How often does my horse/pony need vaccinating?

After the initial course of vaccine, to maintain protection against equine influenza, boosters are required at intervals not exceeding 12 months. This rule is strictly enforced by many competition organizers.

5. My horse/pony is old and has been vaccinated all his life surely he now has some immunity?

Immunity to infection requires an adequate level of protecting antibodies. The high level achieved after a full course of vaccination falls steadily over time until it is below the level providing immediate protection. The incubation period between exposure to the virus and development of symptoms can be as little as 24 hours which is insufficient time for the body's immune system to react and produce more antibodies. Booster vaccination at the stipulated intervals maintains a high level of protecting antibodies to combat infection. Influenza viruses have the ability to create new strains requiring periodic adjustment to the vaccines to keep up with changes to the virus.

6. Who can do the vaccination?

Only a qualified Veterinary Surgeon.

7. Where do I find my local equine veterinary surgeon?

RCVS website Find a vet/equine.

Google search for vets in your area. Some practices may be equine specific and others general practice.

8. How much will this cost?

The basic cost of each vaccination is in the region of £40/£45 to which may be added a visit fee which normally varies depending on the distance travelled and is usually in the order of £10 to £40. This visit fee may be reduced or cancelled if a number of horses on the premises require vaccination or veterinary attention at the same time.

9. Whose responsibility is it for ensuring the vaccinations are at the right date spacings?

It is the owner's (not keeper's by law) responsibility to ensure that vaccinations are kept up to date and comply with any relevant competition rules. Most veterinary practices send reminders to clients that vaccinations are due.

10. What level of competition or training does this rule apply to?

The vaccination rule applies to all competitions at Area level and above for 2018. This also includes all Zones, Regionals and Championships. However for some sports or venues there may be additional requirements for vaccination e.g. Pony Racing, BHA properties, HOYS, competition under FEI rules. Please refer to the individual sport rulebook and/or entry schedules/information sheets.

11. How will the rule be enforced?

By spot checks at competitions by attending veterinary surgeons.

12. What are the sanctions if my horse/pony is not up to date or unvaccinated?

In 2018 this rule will be strictly enforced at all Championships. If a horse/pony is found to be in breach of the rules the competitor will not be able to compete and the horse/pony sent home. At the Area competitions for 2018 it will be at the discretion of the Official Steward but a permanent note will be placed in the passport indicating the error.

13. How can I rectify my vaccinations if there is no time between Areas and Championships?

Unfortunately in some Areas and some Sports there will not be sufficient time to rectify any error. This is why it is so important that you check (or have checked) your horse/pony's passport asap.

It is suggested that Branches and Centres could have a passport/ vaccination education session specifically for this purpose.

14. What do I need to do now?

Have your vaccination record checked, especially the primary two injections, for date intervals. Also, if buying/loaning a new horse/pony check this early on.