



Post-Survey Talking Points – The Impact of Covid-19 on Horse Welfare and Equestrian Businesses in MB

February 2021

1. MHC and the Equestrian Community fully supports and understands the provinces position on trying to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and understand the need for practices that encourages people to stay home, maintain appropriate physical distancing and sanitizing practices. Our work with Sport Manitoba on our Return to Play and Return to Competition documents fully demonstrate this support and understanding of the situation.
2. Horses however cannot be put in the closet or set aside as other sporting equipment. Equestrian is a cross between the worlds of Agriculture and Sport. Despite the fact that stay-at-home orders are in place, horses require continued care and exercise to maintain the health and wellbeing.
3. The province has listed care of horses/stables as an essential service, which includes light exercise. This has caused safety and liability insurance issues. Horse owners and leasers (responsible for the care and wellbeing of the horse) riding horses to provide light (as per the orders) without the supervision of a coach (as per the orders) results in a dangerous situation for the horse, rider and the facility they are riding at. These owners and leasers are coming out to provide essential care as per the orders, but most riders are not capable of safely exercising their horses for significant periods of time without the assistance and guidance of professional coaches.
4. For businesses that own multiple horses for the purpose of teaching and sport (school horses) provincial closures provide a challenging situation to deal with. The costs for labour, supplies and equipment for essential care are substantial. Providing exercise for these horses poses a further challenge – without the ability to provide lessons, it costs money to hire professionals who are qualified and safe to exercise these horses when students are not allowed to ride.
5. A recent survey of 41 equestrian businesses in Manitoba that own school horses found costs (not including rent, utilities and labour) for the necessity's of providing feed, water, bedding and an outdoor turnout averaged \$285/month/horse. The number of hours of labour for caring for these animals not including exercise was 5 hrs/week/horse. Considering the average number of horses owned by these businesses was 12, that means businesses were experiencing minimum losses of \$3000/month for labour plus \$3500/month for raw costs for this essential care, for losses of a minimum \$6500/month. Again, these costs do not include costs for exercising horses, rent, utilities, debt and other administrative business costs.

6. The survey suggests that 40% of these businesses have sold school horses during the lockdowns, and 1% of horses have been euthanized. Those businesses that were forced to sell horses (or euthanize horses in unfortunately situations) do not have the financial ability to re-purchase horses again once provincial restrictions are lifted and are unable start up again or run at previous income levels.

7. Unlike some businesses that have been able to offer alternative services during the shut down, like online lessons or take-out, equestrian liability insurance severely limits the ability of businesses and coaches to offer online instruction. Instead businesses have resorted to selling and euthanizing school horses, and in some cases finding short-term alternatives like leasing the horses to others to pay for their care.

8. Once provincial restrictions are lifted for the industry, the situation becomes precariously dangerous. For businesses that have not sold their school horses, they are trying to open and offer lessons on horses that have not been exercised for a considerable period of time. This is unsafe for both human and horse participants.

9. Equestrian facilities are naturally large in order to provide adequate space for horses. Most lessons are taught in arenas the size of hockey rinks or bigger, and the nature of horseback riding makes physical distancing a natural phenomenon as horses need to be kept a minimum of 2 m apart for safety reasons. Having multiple riders in an arena, that are already there for essential care of the horses, can be done with adequate physical distancing and would be even safer if a coach was allowed to supervise these essential rides. Most equestrian facilities are technically “under-roof” however majority are not heated or airconditioned and are essentially outdoors with protection from rain, snow and wind.

10. The industry needs financial aid as well as special considerations when it comes to provincial regulations during Code Red lockdowns. The industry is not going to be able to recover after the latest 3.5 month provincial lockdown, which will have set back businesses with an average of 12 school horses over \$22,750 in just essential care costs of the horses alone, not including the losses incurred during the spring 2020 lockdown which was an additional 2 to 3 months for most of these businesses. Currently there are no government programs in Manitoba to help cover these costs, however, Ontario has recently developed a provincially funded program to help these businesses called the Equine Hardship Program. Such a program developed for Manitoba should be done in consultation with the industry to ensure that those businesses that did sell horses or found other means to survive the lockdowns can also participate and help the industry to recover and grow following the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Information gathered from an industry survey on Manitoba equestrian facilities, February 2021

Survey link: [Survey on the effects of Covid-19 on the Manitoba Equestrian Community 2021](#)

Manitoba Horse Council
145 Pacific Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R3B 2Z6
John Savard, Executive Director
Mhc.exec@sportmanitoba.ca
204-925-5719