



COVID-19 RETURN TO OPERATIONS FRAMEWORK October 2020

In all equestrian operations and activities relating to COVID-19, primary reference is from the Province of Manitoba’s ‘Manitoba Protection Plan’; gov.mb.ca/covid19/protection. Follow link to ‘State of Emergency’ for the most up-to-date requirements.

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Please note: This document is to be used as a framework for business operations (boarding barns, stables and other facilities) relating to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. We recommend following all current local, provincial and federal recommendations and directives. Horse and human safety are paramount when making amendments to common horse and human interaction routines.

Facility managers and users should keep themselves aware of updates to the provincial plan on a day-to-day basis. Each facility or event organiser should prepare their own COVID-19 plan.

In the Province of Manitoba, the Provincial Health Officer is the last resort for decision-making related to COVID restrictions. Manitoba Horse Council (via Sport Manitoba) is the conduit for all equestrian activities, regardless of individual, member or business status of equestrians.

Recommendations for operations during COVID-19 restrictions

Managing Farm/Facility Operations

1. Set up a welcome station outside or just inside the facility entry points with hand wash or sanitizer for all persons to wash or disinfect their hands.
2. Require everyone to complete and sign the Self-Declaration Form, sign-in, sign-out.
3. Maintain physical distance of two meters in all aspects of operations.
4. All persons should wear a face mask as mandated by current provincial directives and always have a mask ready for use.
5. Minimize personnel onsite, limiting access to essential coaches, staff, grooms, veterinarians, farriers, trainers, boarders who need to exercise their horses and lesson students, arriving at appointed times.
6. Adhere to current provincial directives regarding number of persons on site at any one time. This includes limiting the number of “persons responsible” for minors during lessons, and setting up a socially distanced seating/viewing area.
7. Restrict external companion animals from visiting the property and visitors from having physical contact with farm livestock and companion animals.
8. Set up a delivery area and process and avoid passing things from person to person (including feed, bedding, supplies, etc.).
9. Leave doors open whenever possible, without compromising horse or human safety.
10. Change clothes, clean and disinfect boots, and wash hands before going to a different farm.
11. Have a conversation with all suppliers including veterinarians and farriers to ensure they are following their organization’s protocols, as well as those of your facility.
12. Clean washrooms frequently.
13. Ensure all staff and boarders are aware horses, tack, equipment and clothing can be vectors of COVID-19.
14. Have sanitization supplies readily available and easily accessible.

Managing Employees and Staff

1. Consistently schedule and group employees so that in event of an outbreak, contact trace-back can be easily facilitated and contained, and not all essential staff will be impacted.
2. Facility to provide face masks and gloves for staff.
3. Do not allow anyone who is sick to come to work, visit or to ride their horse until symptoms have dissipated.
4. Ensure one staff member each day is assigned the duty of overseeing the implementation of any protocols, keeps track of what was cleaned and when, and wipes down all commonly touched sites at least daily (multiple times a day is preferable). Sites include: Doorknobs including bathrooms, horse stalls, tack rooms, wash stalls, hoses, etc.; light switches; Wash rack handles/sprayers; Pitch forks, brooms, shovel handles, wheelbarrows; Cross-ties, bathing and grooming equipment (if shared); Shared farm vehicles between uses.
5. Have a checklist and instruction guides in place so everyone knows how the daily care schedule works (i.e. make sure employees can perform any task on the farm in case someone was to fall ill).

This could include a log book to note daily requirements of supplies which need replacing, problem areas, etc.

6. Compartmentalize duties and segregate areas/items (e.g. one person deals with one side of the barn and has his or her own mucking supplies while the other person handles the other side of the barn).
7. Employees must wash hands before eating and eat only in a designated eating area or in their vehicles. Employees should also wear gloves whenever possible, treating as though they were bare hands; avoiding touching their face and mask.
8. Wash riding gloves after each use and have different pairs for different barns.
9. Avoid carpooling unless coming from the same household.
10. Consider leaving gates to the front entrance of the barn open. If a keypad is used for access, consider getting a remote control for opening the gates.
11. Discuss the download of the COVID tracing app to employees' smartphones.

Managing Boarders

1. Implement a boarder schedule that limits the number of people allowed at the facility at any time, be it for riding or visiting their horses. The schedule is to ensure the required physical distancing. Consider by appointment only.
2. Group boarders, riders, trainers and coaches so that the groups can be easily managed, and, in the event of an outbreak, contact trace-back can be easily facilitated and contained.
3. Create temporary spaces for boarders and owners to interact with their horses in controlled and safe outdoor environment (e.g. outdoor grooming stalls, paddocks, tie posts, etc.) and avoid the need to enter spaces with multiple common surfaces such as barn aisles and grooming stalls. If outdoor options are not available, boarders should tack horses up in their stalls only, not in shared grooming stalls.
4. Unless a secure area or tack locker is available to store each horse/rider's equipment, have boarders, trainers and other third-party farm members (veterinarians, farriers, etc.) take commonly used equipment (tack, grooming supplies, riding equipment, miscellaneous equipment) with them to their personal residence or vehicle and only bring out as needed.
5. Install disinfection stations with the appropriate disinfection products on common surfaces. Ask boarders to wipe down common surfaces after use.
6. Discuss the download of the COVID tracing app to boarders' smartphones.

Managing Lessons

1. Teach private, semiprivate or small group lessons based on availability of space, physical distancing logistics and maximum gathering regulations in your jurisdiction (e.g. do not allow students to follow nose to tail – ensure adequate spacing between horse and rider combinations).
2. Group boarders, riders, trainers and coaches so that the groups can be easily managed, and, in the event of an outbreak, contact trace-back can be easily facilitated and contained.
3. Use outdoor rings whenever available.
4. Design lesson programs where students can go one at a time through exercises.
5. Install disinfection stations with the appropriate disinfection products on common surfaces. Ask lesson students to wipe down common surfaces after use (e.g. school tack and grooming supplies).

Managing Injuries

1. Create riding schedules for both lessons and boarders (including free rides and hacking).
2. Ensure someone with first aid training is at the facility when clients are riding or participating in lessons.
3. Ensure the person trained in first aid is up to date with all COVID-19 related first aid protocols. Discuss with local public health authorities if unsure of these protocols.
4. Set designated barn hours to ensure that nobody is in the barn alone if there is an emergency or injury situation.
5. Make sure COVID-19 supplies (disposable masks, gloves) are readily available for those assigned first aid duty and that there are extra masks, gloves etc. in case there is an injury. Clearly indicate where these supplies are located in the facility.

Managing Ships-Ins, Breeding, and Equine Sales Procedures

Ship-Ins

1. Designate an exclusive ship-in location.
2. Make sure the person transporting in is aware of the facility's COVID-19 protocols in advance.
3. Minimize the amount of people coming with the horse (i.e. just the rider).
4. Develop your own screening process before allowing others to ship in (e.g. travel history in previous weeks, potential contact with COVID-19 infected individuals in the last 14 days).
5. Record entry onto the farm and into buildings. Ensure records identify name of visitor(s), date of visit and time/length of visit.

Breeding

1. All paperwork should be done electronically.
2. Attendants must wear disposable gloves.
3. Drivers should wait in their vehicles.
4. Non-essential individuals should not be allowed into the facility. This should include attendants bringing mares from other farms.
5. Allow the breeding facility staff to handle the unloading, breeding and loading of the mare.
6. Breeding equipment should be disinfected after each use. All biosecurity practices for equine breeding should be followed.

Sales

1. Ensure sales are by appointment only; no drop ins.
2. Ensure equipment is wiped down between riders when clients are coming into the barn to try horses.
3. Ensure clients are aware of all COVID-19 related protocols being followed in advance.
4. Have someone meet the client out in the parking lot before they enter the facility to ensure all protocols are clear and being followed.
5. Have horse ready for trial so that the client can directly go into arena after disinfecting their hands.
6. Have waivers and COVID-19 self assessment forms electronically signed before the client comes to the facility.

For additional information on biosecurity best practices, see the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) [National Farm and Facility Level Biosecurity Standard for the Equine Sector](#).

Biosecurity Plans

Biosecurity at the farm level can be defined as management practices designed to reduce the introduction of diseases onto a farm and minimize their spread within and off the farm. Developing a farm or facility biosecurity plan involves achieving the right balance between mitigating disease risk and prevention.

Details on developing and maintaining a biosecurity plan are provided in the CFIA [National Farm and Facility Level Biosecurity Standard for the Equine Sector](#). Please check with your Provincial/Territorial Sport Organization (PTSO) for any additional biosecurity materials that may be available.

It is helpful to have knowledge of horse and human diseases, modes of transmission and protection methods for horses and people. This information and more are included in the CFIA User Guide that accompanies the National Farm and Facility Level Biosecurity Standard for the Equine Sector. Along with these resources, work with your farm or facility veterinarian and industry experts on developing a biosecurity plan that is appropriate for your operation.

Objectives of a Biosecurity Plan

1. Prioritize health and safety of horse owners, riders, farm owners, etc.
2. Apply recommendations and best practices from local, provincial and federal governments and public health authorities.
3. Establish and maintain a similar COVID-19 response across all facilities and farms.
4. Have open communication between stakeholders and maintain a respectful work environment.

Six Steps to Developing a Biosecurity Plan for Your Facility

1. Prepare a diagram of the farm or facility.
2. Identify risk factors (e.g. types of diseases and their exposure, introduction and transmission).
3. Review management practices.
4. Identify biosecurity goals, protocols and best practices.
5. Implement the plan.
6. Review the effectiveness of the biosecurity plan and seek continuous improvement of best practices.

Step 1: Prepare a diagram of the farm or facility

A farm or facility diagram is useful for visualizing and identifying opportunities where horses and people could come into contact with other animals, people or equipment that are potential sources of disease.

Create a diagram of the premises and identify traffic routes, animal housing areas, storage areas and other areas onsite where people, horses and equipment may interact. Review the diagram and create a list of the biosecurity concerns. See the [National Farm and Facility Level Biosecurity Standard for the Equine Sector](#) for diagram examples.

Step 2: Identify risk factors

Review your diagram created in Step 1 and create a list of the biosecurity risk factors and concerns at your facility. See the [National Farm and Facility Level Biosecurity Standard for the Equine Sector](#) for information on transmission.

Step 3: Review management practices

Management practices can pose a risk for introducing and spreading pathogens onsite. Identify your facility's daily care and management practices and also review other less-frequent activities that may result in the introduction or spread of disease.

Practices to review include:

1. Correspondence with everyone prior to entering facility (i.e. email, phone call).
2. Ensure that all staff, boarders, riders, etc. are aware of the provincial and federal government's current travel restrictions.
3. Consider mandatory procedures for all staff, boarders, riders, etc. to inform the facility owner/manager of any upcoming or past travel. Should an individual travel outside the current allowed travel areas, he or she must quarantine (self-isolate) for 14 days upon return to Canada and before returning to your facility. Some people may be exempt from self-isolation requirements but the facility must be aware of any such person intending to attend the facility, so that compromised persons have adequate warning. The facility may choose to bar anyone not self-isolating, regardless of provincial regulations.
4. Establish that people will be required to stay away from your facility for 14 days if:
 - Anyone in their household has had contact of any kind with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 within 14 days.
 - They have experienced any cold or flu-like symptoms in the last 14 days, including but not limited to fever, cough, sore throat or respiratory illness.
 - Anyone in their household has returned from any destination outside Canada the current allowed travel areas in the past 14 days.
5. Limit necessary in-person meetings to groups of ten people or fewer in a large space and

- maintaining social distancing.
6. Consider purchasing options with a commercial supplier, hardware or lumber store for commercial-grade cleaning and sanitation products.
 7. Discuss the download of the province's contact-tracing app with staff and boarders.

Step 4: Identify biosecurity goals, protocols and best practices

Using Steps 1-3, review and identify the biosecurity challenges and risks associated with your facility or business. Identify biosecurity goals and best practices that can be implemented to address the current gaps in your farm's biosecurity. This includes discussing strategies with your veterinarian and public health authorities if necessary.

Some best practices and recommendations based on government and public health authority guidelines include:

1. Identify all property and facility entry points where signage can be placed to notify visitors that biosecurity practices are in place and how to comply.
2. Set up an electronic health screening declaration form for every person entering the facility to fill out. (Please see the [Sample Self-Declaration Form](#) as an example.)
3. Create an online schedule for horse owners to manage their time at the facility.
4. Identifying common areas where signage can be posted reminding people to:
 - a. Wash hands for at least 20 seconds with warm water and soap. Hand washing should be done upon arrival to the barn, before they leave and in between when needed (e.g. after sneezing, blowing a nose, before/after touching tools).
 - b. Avoid touching their faces, especially eyes, nose or mouth.
 - c. Cover cough or sneeze into their arm or tissue, not hand.
 - d. Dispose of tissues in an appropriate bin and immediately wash hands (while taking care to avoid surfaces or protective wear).
 - e. If a mask is sneezed into, it should be replaced with a fresh mask immediately.
5. Decide if non-essential outside vendors, family, friends, pets or visitors may enter the farm.
6. Follow government and public health authority directives when managing the number of people allowed in the facility at one time based on the size and layout of your structures, physical distancing logistics and maximum gathering restrictions in your jurisdiction.-Be aware that these numbers can change from day to day in line with provincial directives.
7. Hold activities outdoors when safe and possible.

Step 5: Implement the plan

When best practices and protocols have been identified to address your facility's biosecurity challenges and risks, develop an implementation strategy. Biosecurity tasks should be prioritized based on your facility needs and an appropriate timeline for implementation should be established, as all tasks may not be obtainable at once. Phase in practices based on what will have the most impact and mitigate the largest risks. Please see the section below for recommendations for implementing biosecurity best practices in different aspects of your businesses.

Step 6: Review the effectiveness of the biosecurity plan and seek continuous improvement of best practices

For a biosecurity plan to be effective, best practices must be followed and integrated into daily routines to mitigate the risk of disease introduction and spread. Review the effectiveness of your biosecurity plan on a regular basis and, when necessary, implement improvements to ensure your facility is protected. Communication is key for an effective biosecurity plan.

Methods of Pathogen Transmission

Pathogens can be transmitted by several routes; however, not all pathogens are transmitted by all routes. Pathogen characteristics, such as the ability to survive in a specific environment, can significantly affect the mode of transmission.

- Direct transmission: Pathogens transmitted between animals through close physical contact.
- Direct contact: Transmission through close physical contact between a susceptible animal and an infected animal, their bodily fluids or tissues.
- Indirect transmission: Some pathogens can be transmitted through an intermediary that has been contaminated and/or infected. This may be an inanimate object (e.g. a bridle, dirty clothing, contaminated feed and/or water) or a live animal (e.g. insect, rodent).
- Indirect contact: Transmission through contact with people (e.g. contaminated clothing, footwear, and/or hands) or with an inanimate object through the shared use of equipment such as needles, syringes, artificial vaginas or dentistry equipment.
- Ingestion: Transmission by consuming feed and water contaminated by pathogens.
- Aerosol transmission: Pathogens can be transmitted short distances by large fluid droplets generated by coughing, sneezing, snorting or whinnying.
- Airborne transmission: By very small particles that can be generated by disturbing contaminated materials.
- Vectors (living organisms): Transmission by a living organism (e.g. people, animals, insects and ticks) infected with or contaminated by pathogens.

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