

EQUINE OPERATIONS IN NEW YORK STATE

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR USE DURING COVID-19 OUTBREAK

These Best Management Practices (BMPs) are practical tips for equine operations to help protect public health. These BMPs are not a substitute for New York State's reopening plan guidance and regulations on business operations. Equine operations are generally covered in Phase I and Phase IV of reopening plans for different activities. Equine operations **must** read and affirm compliance with the New York State Guidance for Non-Food Agriculture Production in order to reopen in Phase I, and must have completed a reopening plan that details safe operations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Information on these NYS guidelines can be found here: <https://forward.ny.gov/industries-reopening-phase#phase-one--agriculture--forestry--fishing---hunting>.

FACTS ABOUT THE SARS-COV-2 VIRUS THAT CAUSES COVID-19

- It is most likely transmitted person to person through respiratory droplets, which is why 6 foot physical distancing is so important
- The virus can persist on surfaces for between 24-72 hours which is why sanitization of commonly touched surfaces is important
- Risks from touching surfaces can be significantly reduced by frequent handwashing, use of hand sanitizers, and avoiding touching the face
- Cloth face coverings can reduce the spread of the virus by those who may be infected but are not showing symptoms

PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 IN EQUINE FACILITIES

All Equine Operations

Facility Personnel

- Equine operations should designate an individual or individuals who are responsible for making determinations of facility access and for enforcing all guidelines; this will likely be the farm owner(s) or manager(s).
- Restrict access to a boarding facility to essential personnel (veterinarians, farriers, equine caretakers, trainers, and horse owners, lessees, or boarders).
- Prohibit non-essential persons (students, friends, family members) from entering the facility.
 - Exceptions can be made for a guardian accompanying a minor.
- Stay 6 feet apart from other people and do not congregate.
- Do not allow access to the facility to anyone who has been exposed to a person with symptoms of COVID-19 (cough, shortness of breath, or fever) or if the person wanting access is showing any symptoms of COVID-19.
- Limit cross-tie use to every other cross-tie.

- ***Use an online sign-up form when possible to encourage horse owners to commit to a time slot that they will be riding or visiting the barn, and limit each time slot to ensure that NYS guidelines on physical distancing are maintained.***
 - As of 5/14, capacity is limited to 50% of maximum occupancy for a particular area as set by the certificate of occupancy.
- Operations should prohibit the use of tightly confined spaces (e.g. supply, equipment and tack storage areas, equipment repair shops, animal care/feed areas, vehicles) by more than one individual at a time, unless all employees in such space at the same time are wearing acceptable face coverings.
 - In addition, facilities should increase ventilation with outdoor air to the greatest extent possible.
- We highly recommend that everyone, including facility staff, wear a face covering while interacting with others even when social distancing is maintained.
 - Riders may remove their face covering while riding as long as they maintain social distancing while mounted.

Facility Environment

- Do not touch anything unless you need to use it.
- Avoid sharing equipment and supplies between persons. Consider having more than one halter and lead rope set for each horse so that staff are not using the same set as the owner/rider.
- The virus can persist on non-porous materials (leather bridles/saddles/halters, nylon halters/lead ropes, gate latches, door handles, spray nozzles) longer than porous materials (cotton lead ropes, saddle pads).
 - Disinfect gate latches, spray nozzles, cross tie snaps, pitchforks, wheelbarrows, and other frequently used non-porous surfaces regularly or after contact with personnel.
 - For guidance on environmental disinfection, please refer to the EPA's list of disinfectants:
 - <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>
 - Stall door handles, hose ends, light switches, and feed scoops are handled by many people and should also be cleaned and disinfected frequently.
 - Facility guidelines should specify which items are to be cleaned by staff and which are the responsibility of individuals using the facility.
 - Facility guidelines should also include a schedule outlining when commonly touched surfaces will be sanitized and instructions for individuals to sanitize surfaces that they touch.
 - Only designated individuals (trainers/staff) are to move and set jumps or other arena equipment unless they designate and train those using the equipment to disinfect the equipment after use.
 - Operations should prohibit the shared use of grooming supplies, helmets, and tack as these may be sources of environmental transmission of COVID-19 to other humans.
- Although there is no evidence that horses can contract or become ill from COVID-19, practice good hygiene by washing your hands with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds or using a >70% alcohol hand sanitizer after touching a horse, communal areas, or communal equipment to prevent environmental spread of the virus.

Additional Recommendations

- Equine operations should go over biosecurity, cleaning and disinfecting, and social distancing protocols with anyone coming on to the premises. We recommend that anyone granted access to the facility should read and sign

a facility-specific document outlining all of the protocols and confirming understanding of each new guideline, with a commitment to adhere to these guidelines.

- Facility managers should post signs throughout the site, consistent with DOH COVID-19 signage. Signage should be used to remind employees to use face coverings, maintain social distancing, properly discard of PPE, report symptoms of or exposure to COVID-19, and to follow hand hygiene and cleaning guidelines.
- In the event of an equine caretaker becoming sick and unable to care for the horses under their care, assigned secondary caretakers should be notified immediately.
 - If the primary equine caretaker becomes sick, he or she should also notify everyone they have been in contact with in the previous two weeks. Quarantine and facility closing decisions should be made in conjunction with the county's health department.
- Primary equine caretakers should draft a document detailing the daily care of the horses under their care in the event that secondary caretakers must take over animal care duties.
 - In addition to daily care instructions, all equine operations should create a document including relevant details for each horse under their care. Pictures of each horse (as well as other permanent identification details, such as microchip number, where applicable) should be included as well as stall number and pasture location so that secondary caretakers know where to place each horse. In addition, emergency contact information for the owner, veterinarian, and farrier should be included for each horse.

Special Considerations for Facilities with Riding Lesson Instruction

Facility Personnel

- Farm owners must explicitly grant permission to each individual wishing to gain access to the facility. This includes anyone wishing to take riding lessons. Minors may be accompanied by one legal guardian.
- Anyone taking riding lessons at an equine facility must be instructed prior to arrival on the facility's social distancing, mask wearing, hand cleaning, and facility cleaning protocols.
 - We recommend that facility owners or managers require riding students to sign a document detailing these protocols and verifying their understanding of the guidelines.

Facility Environment

- Any facilities offering riding lessons should have clear policies regarding entering tack rooms, use of any shared equipment including tack, and should clarify which equipment can and cannot be used by whom
 - Please note that it is difficult to disinfect most leather tack without damaging it; if shared tack must be used, synthetic materials may be easier to disinfect in between uses
- Human numbers in indoor riding arenas should be limited as much as possible. If the arena is relatively small or poorly ventilated, we recommend limiting human presence to a single rider (plus or minus a guardian) and a single instructor. Large or very well ventilated indoor arenas may be able to accommodate more people.
 - NYS guidance released on 6/11 states that: "Viewing of horses for sale/breeding, conducting riding lessons, and any riding of horses may be done in an outdoor or indoor arena/area and by appointment only. There shall be no more than ten individuals in a group at any one time, including, but not limited to instructors, judges, owners, and customers/clients. All interactions must adhere to strict social distancing of six feet between individuals.
- Riders in outdoor riding arenas, cross-country courses, and trail riding areas should observe social distancing.

Special Considerations for Equine Therapeutic Centers

Facility Personnel

- We recommend that equine therapeutic centers send a risk/benefit assessment to participants and volunteers.
 - Based on these assessments, facilities can selectively grant access to participants and volunteers.
- Equine operations should post signage to make clear to participants and volunteers which stable areas are open or closed to them. For example, lounge rooms or social gathering spaces should not be open to participants.

Facility Environment

- Participants should be encouraged to purchase their own riding helmets, but the facility may still offer them for use provided they are disinfected appropriately after each use.
- Facility staff should disinfect all shared equipment after each lesson or session.
- Social distancing, hand cleaning, face touching, and face covering guidelines should be followed at all times.

Additional Points to Consider for all Equine Operations

Youth access to facilities

- Any operations that grant youth access to their facilities should consider the added difficulty of monitoring face and surface touching in young children. We recommend that the person accompanying a minor be vigilant about observing all of the child's interactions with others, equipment, and surfaces in the facility, as well as ensuring that he or she does not touch his or her face.
- If a child is too young to safely ride or interact with horses without physical assistance from a trainer or staff member, consider postponing lessons or barn activities until social distancing is no longer required.

Horse health and welfare considerations

- When possible, be sure to introduce management changes, cleaning protocols, and equipment changes slowly to horses for their welfare as well as for your safety. Horses may need time to adjust to people wearing face coverings, new disinfecting equipment, and new routines.
- Be careful not to spray or apply any disinfectants directly on or near horses where they can breathe in the spray or absorb the substance through their skin.
- Horses may find the strong scent of hand sanitizer or some disinfectants aversive; consider washing some items before placing them near or around a horse's face.
- Any surfaces or items that will be in contact with a horse (e.g. communal tack or equipment) that need to be disinfected between uses should be washed or wiped down with water after being disinfected to avoid irritating the horse's skin and to avoid accidental ingestion by the horse.
- Do not delay routine veterinary appointments if possible; most veterinarians are still able to make farm calls if proper biosecurity measures are taken.

Special Considerations for Equine Events

- Included in New York State's Reopening Plan Phase 4: recreation and education
 - If in doubt about whether or not an event can take place, equine operations would be wise to seek guidance from their reopening committee in the region in which they are located which can be found here: <https://esd.ny.gov/nyforward-faq>
- United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) COVID-19 Toolkit
 - <https://www.usef.org/media/covid19-toolkit>
- Follow WHO recommendations to event organizers
 - https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331764/WHO-2019-nCoV-Mass_Gatherings_Sports-2020.1-eng.pdf

These best management practices are based on guidelines developed by the CDC as well as the Infectious Disease Committee of the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP).

For more detailed information, please visit:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html>
- <https://aaep.org/horsehealth/preventing-spread-covid-19-equestrian-facilities>

Please note that the CDC recommends the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers containing greater than 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol. For guidance on environmental disinfection, please refer to the EPA's list of disinfectants:

- <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>

For the most up-to-date information on New York State's re-opening guidelines, please visit <https://esd.ny.gov/>

- Equine operations should routinely check with the state of New York for additional regulatory guidance; this document provides best management practices but will not offer protection if the operation is violating the state guidelines for their region.

More detailed guidelines on all non-food agricultural operation guidelines:

- <https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/NonFoodAgricultureMasterGuidance.pdf>

To determine your region's phase of re-opening, please refer to <https://forward.ny.gov/industries-reopening-phase>.

Taking these proactive steps will protect your team and your clients, creating a positive impression of equine operations during this pandemic.

We're in this together.

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