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## HealthWatch: Preventing infectious diseases

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### Prevent infectious diseases

Infectious diseases are a constant risk to the health and welfare of horses. Along with vaccination, preventive management techniques are critical to disease prevention.

Dr. Roberta Dwyer of the Maxwell H. Gluck Equine Research Center at the University of Kentucky recommends horse owners should:

- Develop a comprehensive biosecurity plan with a veterinarian and communicate it to all employees. This plan should include disinfection of stalls, barn equipment, and horse trailers.
- Group horses of similar use. Show horses, yearlings, broodmares, etc., should not be commingled.
- Plan a traffic pattern to take farriers, veterinarians, and other personnel first to barns and pastures with at-risk horses (for example, pregnant mares or mares and foals). Work toward horses that have multiple exposures to pathogens (show and trail riding horses).
- Isolate horses returning from a hospital stay or any new horses for a minimum of 14 days and ideally 21 days so they can be monitored for infectious diseases.
- If a horse develops clinical signs (cough, runny nose/eyes, diarrhea, fever, etc.), it should be isolated immediately and protective, disposable clothing should be used by everyone working with the animal (gloves, booties, and overalls).
- Stalls with sick horses should be mucked out last. Properly disinfect tools before using them again.
- Manure and bedding from stalls housing sick animals, including those experiencing abortions, should not be spread on fields.
- Provide running water, liquid hand soap (pump-style container), and disposable paper towels in every barn for hand washing. During an outbreak or when running water is not available, use waterless hand foams or gels (at least 62% ethyl alcohol) after handling horses. Remember, these products are flammable!
- Rodent, insect, bird, and bat control is important year-round! Remove standing water, bird nests, and other habitats.
- Clean and disinfect stalls, water buckets, grooming tools, pitchforks, and other items routinely, and increase the cleaning/disinfecting frequency during an outbreak.
- Continually re-evaluate and update the biosecurity plan.

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### Rein modifiers help horses

A training martingale—a piece of equipment with rings on either side of the horse's neck to stabilize rein position—might provide a more comfortable experience for horses ridden by novice riders.

Dr. Camie Heleski and colleagues at Michigan State University observed novice riders mounted on lesson horses fitted with and without adjustable training martingales to see if the rein modifications had any effect on the conflict behaviors

some horses show when ridden with inconsistent rein tension.

For the study, novice riders were defined as riders who showed a clear lack of independence between seat and hands. Conflict behaviors in the horses included chomping the bit, tilting the head, pinning the ears, and lashing or swishing of the tail.

When ridden with the training martingale, horses in the study maintained what was considered a comfortable head and neck position—one where the eye and withers are at approximately the same height—as opposed to a “hollow” posture, where the head and neck are raised with the nose above the vertical.

“It is important to understand that the purpose of the training martingale is not to force the horse into an unusual or unnatural position,” said Heleski. “Rather, this is something that might be used when the rider’s hands get way out of position.

“For instructors giving novice lessons under limited time constraints, this might be a little bit of help to the horse,” Heleski said.

*Excerpted from [The Horse: Your Guide to Equine Health Care](#). Free weekly newsletters at [TheHorse.com](#).*

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