

COVID-19: Caring for Your Horse During a Pandemic

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At present, there is no evidence that horses, other livestock or companion animals can become sick with COVID-19 or spread it to people. However, horse owners should have alternate plans in place for the care of their horses if they themselves become sick and self-isolate or become hospitalized.

If you are concerned that you might have been exposed to, or are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, please contact your primary care provider or your local public health unit. Please let them know that you have had contact with horses or other animals. If you are concerned about the health of your horse, please contact your veterinarian.



Horse owners should have a plan in place to care for their horses in case they become sick and must self-isolate or become hospitalized.

Preparedness Planning

Who Will Look After My horses?

- Create a short list of people who, at a minimum, can feed, water and muck out your horses on a daily basis.
- Although horses can remain in a stall for days if needed, this is not an ideal situation and could increase the likelihood of colic, respiratory and muscle issues for some horses. If daily exercise is needed, people asked to look after your horses should have the necessary experience (able to turn out horses, ride, or jog harness horses). They might be needed to assist the veterinarian or farrier as well.
- If you are an employer, you should have a plan in place for the number of essential staff required to look after your horses' minimum needs (feed, water, stall cleaning and exercise).

How Will They Look After My Horses?

- Horses should be easily identified by a name on a halter or a stall, or by other identifying features written in instructions for care.
- You should have enough feed (concentrate and hay) and bedding for a week (ideally 2) at your barn. If you regularly pick up your feed, you will need someone else to do this for you or check with the feed, bedding and hay supplier to see if they can deliver.

- ▶ Instructions for care should be written down on paper, in a text, via email or on a voice message that can be provided or sent to whomever is looking after your horses.
- ▶ Instructions for care should include:
 - a. Feed instructions for grain/concentrate.
 - ✓ How much (e.g. 1 can, or by weight), how often (e.g. 3x/day) and where to feed (e.g. on the floor, in the feed tub). Don't forget to tell someone where the feed is located if it's not obvious.
 - b. Feed instructions for forage (e.g. hay/hay cubes).
 - ✓ How much (e.g. 3 flakes/feeding), how often (e.g. 3x/day) and where to feed (e.g. on the floor, in a hay net). Don't forget to tell someone where the hay is located if not obvious.
 - c. Instructions for providing water.
 - ✓ How often to fill up the bucket or change the water (there might be individual horse recommendations for this) and where to find the water tap, including any special instructions for use.
 - d. Feed instructions for supplements.
 - ✓ How much, how often and where they are located in the barn.
 - e. Instructions for medications.
 - ✓ Be clear about which horses receive medications and especially how much and how often medications should be given. Make sure there are spare tools to administer the medication if needed (oral syringes etc.). If medications require a certain level of experience to administer (e.g. intravenous, intramuscular or eye medications), please make sure your help has the needed experience.
 - f. Instructions for bedding.
 - ✓ How much and what type of bedding should be used per horse/day or during a certain time frame, where to find the bedding in the barn and where to put the soiled bedding.
 - g. Instructions for exercise.
 - ✓ Turn-out: Make sure you have specific instructions for individual or group turnout including equipment (e.g. bell boots) and which horses go out together (or which must go out individually).

✓ Ridden exercise: Have specific instructions for tack for each horse and other individual needs. Make sure riders have the experience and wear the necessary safety equipment.

✓ Harness horse exercise: Have specific instructions for the harness worn/equipment card along with people who have the experience to jog/exercise them. Make sure people wear safety equipment.

h. Instructions for individual horses.

✓ People looking after your horses should be aware of any safety concerns (e.g. horse bites or kicks) or any quirks a horse has that could become a safety issue (e.g. horse runs into stall, horse will only back into a wash stall.)

i. Important contact numbers should be provided.

✓ Veterinarian, farrier, feed/hay supplier and other people on your list of caretakers, if help is needed.

What about Cleaning and Disinfecting?

Cleaning and disinfecting commonly used surfaces at least twice a day is a good idea since infected people can be shedding COVID-19 before showing and symptoms. In addition, horses and other pets can carry the COVID-19 virus on their fur or hair. Farriers, veterinarians, horse owners and barn personnel should be aware that they can carry the disease on their skin, hair, tools and clothing for hours or days.

- Water and feed buckets
- Wheelbarrow/shovel/broom handles
- Cross-ties
- Lead ropes
- Halters
- Tack (including harness and bits)
- Grooming supplies
- Stall and barn door handles
- Water taps
- Hoses

Please consider your fellow horse people who may share the barn with you and who might have chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart, lung, liver or kidney disease, who are immune-suppressed or who

might be older and more at risk for complications from infection.

Fortunately, commonly used cleaners and disinfectants are effective against COVID-19. If you are using human products, please make sure they are safe to use around horses. If you are unsure, please check with your veterinarian. Make sure to follow the instructions carefully and rinse any feed, water containers and bits before use. Remember to clean off any debris before disinfecting. Disinfecting wipes can be very useful for cleaning smaller objects and surfaces.

Should I Handle My Horses if I'm Feeling Sick and/or Diagnosed with COVID-19?

Even though there is no evidence that horses can become infected with COVID-19 or transmit the virus to people, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) recommends that people with COVID-19, or symptoms consistent with COVID-19, should avoid direct contact with pets and other animals, including horses. This includes **handling their mouths, feeding horses treats and kissing and/or petting them on the nose**. Please make sure your health provider is aware you work with animals.

What if I'm Sick and Have No One Else to Care for My Horses?

If you have no one to help look after your horses, then the CDC recommends that you wash your hands before and after caring for them, as well as wear a facemask while handling them, until you are cleared by your health care professional. This is a rapidly evolving situation and information might change.

Recommended Online Resources for Animals and COVID-19

- ▶ **(PDF Download)** [Cleaning and disinfection for public settings – Public Health Ontario <https://www.oie.int/en/scientific-expertise/specific-information-andrecommendations/questions-and-answers-on-2019novel-coronavirus/>](https://www.oie.int/en/scientific-expertise/specific-information-andrecommendations/questions-and-answers-on-2019novel-coronavirus/)
- ▶ **(Webpage)** <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19>
- ▶ **(Webpage)** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/interim-guidance-managing-people-inhome-care-and-isolation-who-have-pets.html>

Horse Care Plan - Example

Stable: _____ Manager: _____ Ph #: _____

Horse Name	e.g. Flash			
Behaviour/quirks	e.g. Runs into stall and bites/don't twitch			
Feed (grain) Located in feed room	e.g. Brand-X Time Amount <u>6:00 am</u> <u>1 can</u> _____ _____ _____			
Hay/forage Hay cubes are in large pails in feed room Grass hay is in the last stall on right	e.g. Timothy/ alfalfa hay cubes Time Amount <u>6:00 am</u> <u>1 can</u> _____ _____ _____ Hay – Feed 2 flakes of grass hay with each feeding			
Water	e.g. Check bucket when feeding grain and after turnout. Top up as needed.			
Supplements	e.g. Vitamin B1(1 scoop) with 6pm feed. Located next to grain buckets in feed room			
Medications	e.g. Gastrogard – 1 tube by mouth 30 min prior to 6am feeding. Located in tack box in front of stall			
Bedding	e.g. add 1 bag of shavings to the stall every 2 to 3 days			
Exercise	e.g. Jog 4 miles daily except Sunday Sunday – turn out for at least two hours weather permitting. See equipment card for gear worn.			

Example

Contacts: Veterinarian: _____ Feed supplier: _____
Farrier: _____ Hay supplier: _____ Bedding supplier: _____

Horse Care Plan

Stable: _____ Manager: _____ Ph #: _____

Horse Name				
Behaviour/quirks				
Feed (grain)	Feed: _____	Feed: _____	Feed: _____	Feed: _____
	Time Amount	Time Amount	Time Amount	Time Amount
	_____	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____	_____
Hay/forage	Forage type: _____	Forage type: _____	Forage type: _____	Forage type: _____
	Time Amount	Time Amount	Time Amount	Time Amount
	_____	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____	_____
Water				
Supplements				
Medications				
Bedding				
Exercise				

Contacts: Veterinarian: _____ Feed supplier: _____
 Farrier: _____ Hay supplier: _____ Bedding supplier: _____