



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

David Woodd,
Chief Executive,
Hurlingham Polo Association

20th April 2018

Dear David

Re: Equine Influenza in Argentina (Chile)

We would like to alert you to an emerging situation regarding Equine Influenza in Argentina and the concern over recent consignments of polo ponies to the UK.

As you will be aware, Equine influenza is a serious respiratory disease of horses, donkeys and mules, which is readily transmitted between unvaccinated animals. Occasional outbreaks do occur in unvaccinated or poorly vaccinated horses and equine owners are recommended to keep their animal's vaccination record up to date.

The Argentinian authorities have notified the OIE of an increase in morbidity and geographic distribution of Equine Influenza H3N8, possibly related to the recent outbreaks in Chile through the movement of equines during the summer to pastures around the Andes. Argentinian horses stabled at hippodromes in Mendoza, Buenos Aires, Chubut and San Juan regions were affected.

Experts at the Animal Health Trust have not been able to ascertain whether this is a vaccine delivery or vaccine efficacy problem. The most likely virus is a H3N8 Florida sublineage clade 1 which is represented in some but not all EU EI vaccines currently in use (for details of UK flu vaccine strains please see http://www.aht.org.uk/cms-display/equiflunet_vaccine_strains.html) . We have not seen any issues to date with vaccinated horses and this clade of viruses has not been detected circulating in Europe since 2009.

This year, samples from two unvaccinated recently imported non-Thoroughbreds aged one and two-years-old respectively tested positive. The horses presented with pyrexia, nasal discharge and coughing and were isolated. The positive diagnoses were confirmed by qPCR on a nasopharyngeal swab. Both samples were confirmed for Florida clade 1 in February 2018.

In light of the situation in Argentina, the European Commission has sent us a list of horses which have entered the UK through an EU BIP in the last month.



On the basis of the information from Argentina, the number of recent consignments of polo ponies and the start of the polo competition season, we ask that you remind all your keepers and veterinarians about the risk of equine influenza and the benefits of vaccination for the health and welfare of their animals. Please refer to the AHT Equiflunet website for further information <http://www.equiflunet.org.uk/> .

I also attach in my email the list of recent consignments, as provided by the European Commission.

Kind regards

Dr Helen Roberts,
Equine Disease Policy and Science
Advisor, Defra, UK

Dr Richard Newton,
Director of Epidemiology and Disease
Surveillance, Animal Health Trust,
Newmarket.

HPA Rule 2.4 . PONIES AND WELFARE .

I. **Vaccinations against Equine Influenza for 2018.** All ponies must have been vaccinated against Equine Influenza:

Either by a veterinary surgeon who is a member or fellow of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS);

Or, if vaccinated outside the UK, by a veterinarian licensed to practice in the country in which the horse was vaccinated.

and from 1st January 2018 it is mandatory for annual booster vaccinations to be given:

Either within 365 days of the previous vaccination;

Or in a calendar window of March and April but this is only for ponies with a current up-to-date vaccination record (as per below) on 1st March (see Note).

- i. **Vaccinations must be recorded in each pony's passport, dated, signed and stamped by the administering veterinary surgeon.** Equine Influenza vaccinations administered to ponies outside the EU and recorded, dated, signed and stamped in an identity document that indisputably corresponds to the pony in question by an appropriately licensed veterinarian will be recognised by the HPA.
- ii. **Ponies first vaccinated prior to 1 Jan 2014.** The Equine Passports of ponies first vaccinated against Equine Influenza prior to 1st January 2014 must show that they have received booster vaccinations annually from the year they received their first vaccination.



- iii. **Ponies first vaccinated between 1 Jan 2014 to 1 Jan 2016.** The Equine Passports of ponies first vaccinated against Equine Influenza between 1 January 2014 and 1 January 2016 must show that they have received two primary vaccinations against Equine Influenza given no less than 21 days and no more than 92 days apart. Thereafter, they must have been given booster injections annually.
- iv. **Ponies first vaccinated after 1 Jan 2016.** The Equine Passports of ponies first vaccinated against Equine Influenza after 1 January 2016 must show that they have received two primary vaccinations against Equine Influenza given no less than 21 days and no more than 92 days apart, plus a third booster within 90 to 215 days after the second vaccination. Thereafter, they must have been given booster injections annually.
- v. **Ponies without a valid vaccination record.** Ponies with no recorded previous vaccination history and ponies whose vaccination record does not comply as per the above must re-start a primary vaccination course as per (iii) above, two primary vaccinations, a third booster and thereafter booster injections annually.
- vi. **Playing Restrictions.** No polo pony will be allowed to play at a club or in a tournament until at least 7 days after they have received their second primary vaccination or their annual booster.

Note: Mixing of large numbers of ponies during the polo season increases the risk of exposure to the influenza virus and immunity has been demonstrated to be strongest during the first 6 months after a booster vaccination.

All the owners of ponies imported from Argentina recently have been informed.