

# COVID-19 RETURN TO BUSINESS OPERATIONS - RECOMMENDATIONS

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***Please note: This document maybe used as a recommended framework for equestrian business operations during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is NOT a legal document. The recommendations on Alberta Equestrian Federation’s (AEF’S) COVID page for the Equine Community remain the same at this time. Further, we urge our community to continue to stay abreast of the changing landscape surrounding COVID-19 through credible media sources including federal and local government and health authorities.***

Our job is to educate, not regulate, we realize that horse owners are anxious to see their mounts and are feeling frustrated that, in some cases, access is being restricted. It is important to recognize that landowners and business operators have the right to allow (or not) visitors to their premises and business – at any time. Boarding facilities make their decisions to be open or not based on their individual circumstances. We encourage all facilities to make good decisions taking into consideration Government and health authorities’ guidelines.

You are responsible to ensure the safety of guests, clients, staff, your family – and of course, the horses in your care - at all times. Our recommendation is to follow the guidelines and best practices as set out by government and health authorities with regard to the operation of your business.

*Horse and human safety are paramount when making amendments to common horse and human interaction routines.*

This document is designed as a recommended framework for equine and equestrian facilities to develop a return to business operations plan based on protocols provided by provincial and federal health organizations post-pandemic. Facilities that develop a plan based on this framework will be prepared to resume operations as soon as provincial and federal legislation allows.

## Recommendations for COVID-19 Return to Business Operations

### Managing Farm 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. Maintain physical distance of two meters in all aspects of operations.
3. Minimize additional personnel onsite, limiting access to coaches, staff, grooms, veterinarians, farriers, clients, etc.
4. Restrict external companion animals from visiting the property and visitors from having physical contact with farm livestock and companion animals.
5. Set up a delivery area and process and avoid passing things from person to person (including feed, bedding, supplies, etc.).
6. Leave doors open whenever possible, without compromising horse or human safety.
7. Change clothes, clean and disinfect boots, and wash hands before going to a different farm.
8. 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.
9. Clean washrooms frequently.
10. Ensure all staff and boarders are aware horses, tack, equipment and clothing can be vectors of COVID-19.
11. 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. Do not allow anyone who is sick to come to work, visit or to ride their horse until symptoms have dissipated.
3. Ensure one staff member each day:
  - a. Is assigned the duty of overseeing the implementation of any protocols.
  - b. Keeps track of what was cleaned and when.
  - c. Wipes down all commonly touched sites at least daily (multiple times a day is preferable). Sites include:
    - i. Doorknobs including bathrooms, horse stalls, tack rooms, wash stalls, hoses, etc.
    - ii. Light switches.
    - iii. Wash rack handles/sprayers.
    - iv. Pitch forks, brooms, shovel handles, wheelbarrows.
    - iii. Cross-ties, bathing and grooming equipment (if shared).
    - iv. Shared farm vehicles between uses.
4. 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).
5. Compartmentalize duties.
6. 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 cars. Wear gloves whenever possible. Treat them as if you had bare hands and avoid touching commonly touched sites and your face.
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.

### Managing Boarders

1. Implement a boarder schedule that limits the amount of people allowed at the facility at one a time for riding or visiting their horses and allows for appropriate physical distancing.
  - a. Consider by appointment only.
  - b. 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.
2. 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.
  - a. If outdoor options are not available, boarders should tack horses up in their stalls in only, not in shared grooming stalls.
3. 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.
4. Install disinfection stations with the appropriate disinfection products on common surfaces. Ask boarders to wipe down common surfaces after use.

### Managing Lessons

1. Teach or allow 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.
  - a. 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.
3. Set designated barn hours to ensure that nobody is in the barn alone in case there is an emergency or injury situation.
4. 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 Ship-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.
  - a. Have someone meet the client out in the parking lot before they enter the facility to ensure all protocols are clear and being followed.
4. Have horse ready for trial so that the client can directly go into arena after disinfecting their hands.
5. Have waivers and COVID-19 self assessment forms electronically signed before the client comes to the facility.

## 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.

For information on **Biosecurity best practices**, see the [Equine Biosecurity polices and Best Practices resources](#) provided by the AEF and created with funding provided by the Federal Governments Growing Forward Funding. You will find a simple booklet to create your own Biosecurity Plan, along with other tools and templates. AEF highly recommends you have a Biosecurity Plan in place.

## Additional Reference Material

- [Biosecurity](#) – Alberta Equestrian
- [Horse Biosecurity Guide](#) – Saskatchewan Horse Federation
- [Coronavirus Resources for Horse Owners](#) (reducing cost, optimizing turnout) – United Horse Coalition
- [Equestrian Facility COVID-19 Restriction and Prevention](#) – Washington State
- [Guidance for exercise, recreation and leisure activities](#) (social distancing while riding) – Isle of Man Government
- [Kentucky's horse industry can't stop for COVID-19: 'The mares are foaling right now' \(breeding protocols\)](#) – Lexington Herald Leader
- [March 19, 2020, COVID-19 Update \(carpooling, cohabitating\)](#) – Racing Victoria
- [Modification to Public Hands-Only CPR during the COVID-19 pandemic \(first aid protocols\)](#) – Heart & Stroke
- [Preventing the Spread of COVID-19: Recommendations for the Ambulatory Practitioner](#) (farm scheduling) – American Association of Equine Practitioners