

MAF Biosecurity New Zealand

STAKEHOLDER UPDATE

Equine Influenza



7 September 2007

The following information is intended to keep you informed of New Zealand's response to the outbreak of equine influenza in Australia.

BORDER UPDATE

Passengers



"My name is Leanne Gibson and I'm the Director of Passenger Clearance for MAF Biosecurity NZ. I'd like to take this opportunity to respond to statements that Quarantine Inspectors have been lax at the border in respect to targeting passengers that may have

been exposed to Equine Influenza (EI).

To date, MAF has received 6 complaints about lax border procedures from industry members returning from Australia. Each complaint has been thoroughly investigated and found to be unsubstantiated. In all cases, the passengers had either not been in contact with horses and/or their clothing and equipment was clean and did not pose a biosecurity risk.

I know there is an expectation that inspectors should single out anyone that has an association with horses (such as vets, stable-hands, breeders and jockeys), give them a thorough grilling, search their bags and then disinfect any boots, clothing and equipment.

However, this is not the way our risk profiling works. Inspectors are trained to use the information on the arrival card coupled with targeted questioning to profile people of interest. We recognise that often inspectors will not offer an explanation of why luggage is not checked (based on their risk analysis) and have now modified our feedback process to address this.

You should note that along with risk profiling, all baggage is x-rayed, which makes it extremely unlikely that equipment associated with horses will miss detection if it is not declared.

Clothing and footwear that is dirty may be seized by an inspector, but will be returned after cleaning. If boots and shoes are clean they do not need to also be disinfected by our Inspectors. Again, this has been perceived by many as laxness at the border – when this is not the case.

It is important to note the risk of the equine influenza virus being carried on porous material, such as clothing is negligible. The virus is unlikely to survive beyond 8-12 hours on clothing and washing kills the virus.

And finally – our team of 500 Quarantine Inspectors know that their job is to protect NZ from harmful pests and diseases and they are passionate about undertaking that responsibility."

If you have any concerns about the passenger clearance process at the border – please do not hesitate to contact me on 04-894 0107 or leanne.gibson@maf.govt.nz.

Border restrictions currently in place

The suspension of horse imports from Australia remains in place until further notice. MAF Biosecurity New Zealand is yet to determine the conditions under which imports from Australia could resume.

Interim emergency import requirements for horses from countries with endemic equine influenza have also

been introduced; to further reduce the risk of the virus entering New Zealand and protect our equine industry.

Horses entering New Zealand from countries with endemic equine influenza are now required to be tested for the virus prior to export and again in post arrival quarantine.

Increased hygiene measures are also in place for fresh horse semen imports from Australia. As a precaution, outer coolant containers carrying the semen can no longer be released into New Zealand. Semen itself does not pose a known risk, but the containers carrying it could. Semen will now be transferred to New Zealand coolant containers at the border.

All horse equipment that arrives in New Zealand from Australia is being directed by MAF to a treatment facility for cleaning, disinfection and/or fumigation.

Increased passenger risk profiling at airports continues. Although the risk of passengers bringing the virus into New Zealand on clothing is low, inspectors will question anyone who has visited an infected area or had contact with horses in Australia, and may search their luggage to check whether clothing and footwear is clean.

EQUINE INFLUENZA

Symptoms

Equine Influenza is a flu-type illness caused by an influenza virus, which spreads rapidly.

Signs may include:

- deep, dry, non-productive cough;
- high temperature (often 40-41 degrees C);
- clear nasal discharge possibly becoming cloudy and mucoid;
- harsh lung sounds;
- stiffness and soreness with reluctance to move;
- horses may become tired and not eat, often for days;
- foals can develop fatal pneumonia.

How it spreads

Equine flu spreads by horses coughing out infected droplets that infect other horses in close proximity. These droplets may also land on equipment in the vicinity and may transmit virus to other horses if not disinfected properly. There is a short period after a horse is infected with the virus before signs of illness appear, usually one to five days. Infected horses can pass the virus to other horses during this time and for at least five days after horses appear to have recovered.

PRECAUTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

- If you are returning from Australia clean all footwear, clothing and equipment prior to departure.
- Declare any contact with horses in Australia on your passenger arrival card and make yourself known to a MAF Biosecurity quarantine inspector.
- If you have had contact with horses in Australia, we recommend that you avoid contact with horses for three days when you return to New Zealand. Although there is no documented evidence of equine influenza ever being transferred from humans to horses, there is a theoretical risk that the virus can be carried inside the human nose.
- When a horse (especially one from overseas) arrives on your property, keep it separate from other horses for 14 days.
- If a horse develops a deep, dry cough or high temperature contact your vet or the MAF Biosecurity exotic pest and disease hotline **0800 80 99 66** immediately.

For further information visit: www.biosecurity.govt.nz