

13/12/2021

Advice from BEF Equine Infectious Disease Advisory Group on Equine Influenza Vaccine Policies

Dear member body Chief Executive and member body Veterinary Representative,

Following on from discussions held between EIDAG and representatives of BEF member bodies held on 6 December, EIDAG offers the following advice and comment on Equine Influenza Vaccine Policies.

Selection of Influenza Vaccination Regulations

- Influenza virus spreads via the airborne route and has the ability to spread rapidly over distances in excess of that of a typical equestrian premises, whether indoor or outdoor.
- The primary aim of flu vaccination policies is to protect individual horses from clinical illness should they encounter equine influenza virus.
- An additional benefit to individual member bodies of achieving influenza vaccine compliance is that increasing vaccination rates within a population (i.e. horses frequently meeting and mixing within a specific disciplines) will provide a level of herd immunity (i.e. protection of the entire population) which in turn, helps to protect the sport from reputational damage and risk of event cancellation.
- Member bodies can regard themselves and their members as role models, which, by illustrating good practice on flu vaccination, may increase awareness of the importance of flu vaccine in horse owners in general. This in turn reduces the risk of spread to competition animals and disruption of sporting events.
- There is considerable scientific evidence to support the assertion that horses which are vaccinated at six monthly intervals are protected more effectively from clinical signs of flu, and are less likely to spread infection, than those vaccinated at 12 monthly intervals.
- Additional benefit can be gained by administering boosters strategically, i.e. at the times of year corresponding with periods of increased horse gathering.
- Furthermore, MB governing sports which are concentrated into a specific season rather than having year-round activities, should note that the EIDAG's optimal schedule can be achieved with one vaccine per year provided that the annual vaccination is given in the month which will allow "within 6 months & 21 days (and not within 7 days) before the arrival at the gathering".
- Existence of a large number of divergent flu vaccine policies created considerable confusion amongst horse owners and their veterinary advisors, increasing the likelihood of horses attending

gathering lacking adequate protection from flu and undermining confidence in the value of vaccination generally.

Gold - Silver Gilt- Silver - Bronze standard

In line with our current advice, EIDAG have revised our criteria for variable standards for flu vaccination by adding an additional level (Silver Gilt) as follows:



Checking and auditing vaccine compliance

We recognise that currently checking all vaccine records requires considerable effort from both participants and organisers of events and we commend the efforts of British Vaulting, British Endurance, British Horseball and British Horse Society in achieving this. We anticipate that the advent of the Digital Stable may significantly reduce the challenges of this task in future.

The alternative to checking records for all participants is to rely on self-declaration supplemented by spot checking of vaccine records before or at gatherings. EIDAG advise member bodies to add reminders of the need for vaccination for all participants at the time of registration, for example by requiring local event organisers to include of a statement reminding participants of their vaccine policy on entry forms or in the notices provided to participants of run times or other scheduling details. Participants should also be reminded that they must bring every horse's passport to every gathering and be prepared to allow local organisers and event officials to inspect the passport.

Policies on "spot checking" are not well defined and EIDAG urge member bodies to formalise their policies and offer explicit advice such that for every affiliated event, organisers are required to spot check at least 10% of vaccine records, to record data on vaccine schedule breaches and evidence this by submitting an annual audit on vaccine policy compliance in their sport to BEF who will audit overall compliance. Collation and monitoring of these data will be invaluable in monitoring the impact of the EIDAG's work.

Vaccination Breaches

EIDAG also encourage member bodies to include in their vaccination policy a specific requirement that any horse which is found to have breached the recommendations outlined above for the primary course and first booster, or have exceeded 12 months between subsequent boosters, should be required to restart the primary course before being allowed entry to gatherings.

Specific Policy Wording

There is considerable confusion around flu vaccination, and this is exacerbated by variations in wording of policies used across sporting organisations; often slight variations have little medical or regulatory impact and therefore serve little purpose. To achieve consistency in details, EIDAG urge member bodies to revise their regulations and rules to use one of the two specific wording options below, which are modelled on the format of FEI Equine Influenza Vaccination requirements:

Gold & Silver Gilt: optimal schedule

1. An initial primary course of two vaccinations must be given: the second vaccination must be administered within 21-60 days of the first vaccination.
2. The first booster must be administered within 6 calendar months following the date of the administration of the second vaccination of the primary course.
3. Booster vaccinations must be administered at a maximum of 12 months intervals however horses competing in our gatherings (as appropriate) must have received a booster within 6 months + 21 days (and not within 7 days) before arrival at the Gathering.
4. Horses may attend gatherings 7 days after receiving the second vaccination of the primary course.
5. Horses that received the primary course prior to *1 January 2022** should be permitted to have an interval of up to 92 days between the first and second vaccination of the primary course and for the first booster an interval of up to 7 months following the date of the administration of the second vaccination of the primary course.

** Member bodies should adjust this date to correspond with the timing of their introduction of this policy.*

6. Horses that received the primary course prior to 1 January 2005 are not required to fulfil the requirement for the first booster, providing there has not been an interval of more than 12 months between each of their subsequent booster vaccinations.

Silver & Bronze: minimally appropriate schedule

1. An initial primary course of two vaccinations must be given: the second vaccination must be administered within 21-60 days of the first vaccination.
2. The first booster must be administered within 6 calendar months following the date of the administration of the second vaccination of the primary course.
3. Booster vaccinations must be administered at a maximum of 12 months intervals thereafter.
4. Horses may attend gatherings 7 days after receiving the second vaccination of the primary course.
5. Horses that received the primary course prior to *1 January 2022** should be permitted to have an interval of up to 92 days between the first and second vaccination of the primary course and for the first booster an interval of up to 7 months following the date of the administration of the second vaccination of the primary course.

** Member bodies should adjust this date to correspond with the timing of their introduction of this policy.*



- Horses that received the primary course prior to 1 January 2005 are not required to fulfil the requirement for the first booster, providing there has not been an interval of more than 12 months between each of their subsequent booster vaccinations.

Please note that an important deviation from the current FEI policy in the EIDAG-recommended wording options above is that we advise a maximum interval of **60 days** between the first and second vaccine of a primary course (FEI and the majority of member body policies currently allow 92 days. We also advise a maximum interval between the 2nd injection of a primary course and the first booster of **6 months** (FEI currently allows 7 months).

We are hopeful that the proposals set out above will add clarity and unity to influenza vaccine strategies across equestrian sport and allow all Member Bodies to achieve an evidence-based approach to equine welfare.

Your sincerely,



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