



Equine Influenza FAQs

Q: What is Equine influenza?

Equine Influenza is a highly infectious disease of horses, mules and donkeys occurring globally caused by strains of Influenza A virus. The disease affects the upper and lower respiratory tract and has an almost 100 % infection rate in an unvaccinated horse population.

Q: How serious is it?

It is the most potentially damaging of the respiratory viruses that occur in UK equines (it is an 'enzootic' rather than 'exotic' disease) and disease symptoms in non-immune animals include high fever, coughing and nasal discharge. In some cases where secondary bacteria are involved, bronchitis and pneumonia can result. Unvaccinated animals may suffer permanent lung or heart damage and those that are seriously affected may never fulfil or return to their true athletic potential.

Q: How can Equine Influenza be prevented?

By the immunisation of horses through vaccination. It is essential that much of the UK equine population is fully vaccinated and modern vaccines can provide significant protection against infection. It is a common misconception that only those horses competing in various disciplines such as horse racing and FEI competition should be vaccinated.

Q: Why does the BHA have a mandatory vaccination rule?

Influenza outbreaks in unvaccinated or poorly vaccinated populations can disrupt equine sporting activities for prolonged periods. The Racing regulator, in the UK, introduced mandatory vaccination of racehorses and those using racecourse premises in 1981. Point to Pointing, Arab Racing and Pony racing have similar Rules.

Q: Do racing jurisdictions in other countries have such a rule?

Yes, some countries have a similar rule, although the intervals between vaccine administration may vary.

In addition there are some countries where Equine Influenza vaccination is not compulsory; for example, Australia which is currently (June 2014) free from Equine Influenza and there is no mandatory requirement to vaccinate racehorses.

If you are racing a horse overseas it is important to check the racing jurisdictions current vaccination requirements.

Q: Where can I find the up to date BHA Vaccination rule?



The Rule can be found on the BHA Rules website - [Horse and Owner Manual \(E\) Rule 18](#).

An overview of the requirement of the current Rule (correct 18th June 2014) are as follows:

- Vaccinations have to be administered by a Veterinary Surgeon with a vaccine recognised by the BHA to be against Equine Influenza.
- The horse must have received two primary vaccinations which are given not less than 21 days and no more than 92 days apart.
- If sufficient time has elapsed, the horse must also have received a booster which is given not less than 150 days and not more than 215 days after the second component of the primary vaccination.
- A further booster vaccination at intervals not more than a year apart is required thereafter.
- None of the vaccinations must have been given on day of a race in which the horse is entered or on any of the 6 days before the race

Q: What are the penalties for noncompliance?

These rise with the frequency and severity of the offence and can be found linked to the [Rules Manual E Rule 18](#) in the [Guide to Penalties](#). The horse may also not be able to race. Systematic evasion of the Rules is regarded extremely seriously by the Authority and has resulted in [disqualification of several years](#).

Q: What do you do when vaccinations do not comply with the rule e.g. an annual booster has been missed

If a horse has, for example, not been given an annual booster or missed the booster given between 150-215 days after the second component of the primary vaccination course, the horse is required to undergo another full primary vaccination course (with subsequent boosters being given at the appropriate time intervals) the horse cannot race without additional penalty until it has received the first and second vaccinations of the new course.

Q: Is there a way I can ensure the vaccination schedule is correct before the passport checked at the races?

Yes, if you are unsure whether a vaccination schedule and corresponding passport entries comply with the BHA Rules regarding Equine Influenza you can contact the Equine Health and Welfare department at equine@britishhorseracing.com. We encourage Trainers to check the vaccinations are up to date and correctly entered, and seek advice when they are unsure, to prevent avoidable penalties.



Q: Why does the rule have these specific requirements with regard to when vaccinations need to be administered?

Racing Jurisdictions such as the BHA seek advice and guidance from vaccine manufacturers and scientists (especially immunologists). Research shows that antibody levels against the disease rise dramatically following vaccination and slowly decline with time. If too much time passes before booster vaccination, horses become susceptible to the disease as immunity has waned.

Q: What Equine Influenza vaccines can I use?

Horses in training in the UK must be vaccinated with an Equine Influenza vaccine that is currently authorised by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD). The VMD are the government body responsible for the safe and effective use of veterinary medicinal products in the UK. Up to date details of authorised vaccines can be found on the VMD website [Product Information Database](#). Information may also be found on the [Nation Office of Animal Health \(NOAH\) compendium](#).

Horses trained overseas must be vaccinated with an Equine Influenza vaccine that is authorised in that particular country.

Q: What other equine vaccines are given which are NOT against Equine Influenza?

There are a number of other important vaccines indicated for equines, which include: tetanus, strangles and equine herpes vaccines.

There is no BHA mandatory requirement to vaccinate horses against anything other than Equine Influenza, however vaccines, such as tetanus are an important way of provide long term protection against certain diseases that may cause mortality or morbidity in horses. A veterinary surgeon will usually advise about the individual needs of a horse, and what other vaccines they may require.

Q: Do vaccinations need to be recorded in the Horse's Passport?

Yes, in accordance with the [Horse Passports Regulations 2009](#), there are requirements to record all vaccines in the horse's passports. Information can also be found in Veterinary Medicines Directorate (a) [Prescribing Veterinary Medicines for Horses Information Leaflet](#) and (b) [Horse Medicines and passport requirements: Important points](#).



Racehorse passports have dedicated pages for veterinary surgeons to enter vaccination details against Equine Influenza and pages for other equine vaccines.

Vaccination details that are not recorded on the pages of the passport are not acceptable. For example a letter from a veterinary surgeon stapled to the passport detailing vaccines given to a horse will not be accepted. These entries must be written directly into the passport by a veterinary surgeon.

Q: Are there any side-effects following Equine Influenza vaccination?

The side effects from Equine Influenza vaccination are minimal. The documented evidence for hundreds of thousands of vaccinations is that considerably less than one in a thousand have any adverse response, however as assurance horses may not race within 7 days of being vaccination.

Q: Why can't horses race within 7 days of being vaccinated?

Following vaccination, the horse's body needs time to respond to the vaccine by increasing the levels of antibody necessary to provide sufficient immunity against any possible exposure to the disease. Very rarely influenza disease can cause heart damage, so this interval is also a precaution against this event.

Q: Can un-vaccinated horse's race?

No. Horses can only race once they have received, as a minimum, the first two components of the primary vaccination course.

Q: Are altered dates acceptable?

No, altered dates with vaccination entries are not acceptable, and they will usually incur a financial penalty. There are strict conditions on how and why alterations are made. If a veterinary surgeon makes a clerical error when completing a vaccination entry in the horse's passport this must be corrected in accordance with [Rule \(E\) 19](#).

Q: How often are vaccinations records checked by Veterinary Officers?

The passport of a racehorse will always be examined by a Veterinary Officer whenever the horse is racing for the first time and whenever the horse is running for the first time with a new trainer. In addition, passports are likely to be examined on an annual basis to ensure the horse's vaccination schedule remains up to date.



Q: Can horses race on the anniversary of their last annual booster without contravening the Rule?

Yes. Clearly the horse will need to be vaccinated after racing on that day because if not, it will mean the horse will require a re-start of a primary vaccination course owing to the booster being given after the deadline. It must not be vaccinated before racing as a 7 day interval is then required before it can race.

Q: What is meant by 'days apart'?

All vaccination intervals referred to above are to be calculated by ignoring the day of vaccination and counting the day of the race. Put another way, calculating the gaps between vaccinations 'day 1' for the purpose of counting is always the day after the horse's last vaccination.

Q: What about leap years?

Under the Rules, whenever calculating the gaps between vaccinations 'day 1' for the purpose of counting is always the day after the horse's last vaccination. The Rule deliberately uses the wording 'not more than a year apart', rather than a given number of days (365 days), so as vaccinations given a full year apart in a leap year also comply with the Rules.

Q: What if I am bringing my horse in from outside the EU?

Please see our [specific requirements](#). If existing vaccinations records are available they may be transferred to an EU compliant passport, provided that the transferred information gives relevant details AND is certified by an identified Veterinarian.

Where the horse passport or identity document does not contain records of vaccination, these must be available with the passport or identity document at all times and comply with [Rule \(E\) 19.4](#) - in that the vaccination records must include, written in English, a combined identification and vaccination certificate signed by a veterinary surgeon which identifies the horse, stating that it has received vaccinations against Equine Influenza and gives the dates of each vaccination.

Q: Some vaccine manufacturers or national animal health authorities require different vaccination intervals as compared to the Rules of Racing

The BHA, as with other racing jurisdictions, has to accommodate vaccinations from racehorses anywhere around the world, with a wide range of vaccines. Therefore most racing jurisdictions have wider intervals allowed for vaccinations than some individual



brands of vaccines or particular national animal health authorities. However, with good planning it is usually possible to accommodate these particular vaccination requirements within the Rules of Racing.