

GUIDE TO THE MANAGEMENT OF THE HIGH HEALTH STATUS EQUINE SUB-POPULATION¹ AND THE HIGH HEALTH-HIGH PERFORMANCE HORSE

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Key principles

- The STABLE becomes the compartment i.e. a horse sub-population kept in registered premises with only horses of a high health status.
- The compartment, if effectively isolated from the rest of the equine population, is the point of reference and is considered “healthy” even if in the surrounding the disease situation might be different.
- A phased approach is applied, in which during the first phase (premises approval period), the health status of the entire resident population of horses is brought up to the high health status. In a second phase, the horses destined to travel are selected from this sub-population and registered as HHP horses. For certification purposes they need to undergo additional health measures.
- Once qualified as an HHP horse, the HHP horse can only reside together with other HHP horses on HHP registered premises.

¹ High health status subpopulation might be referred to as HHS.

Introduction

To facilitate the safe international movement of competition horses, the OIE in collaboration with the Federation Equestre Internationale (FEI) and the International Federation of Horseracing Authorities (IFHA) has developed the concept of the high health status sub-population based on the principles of compartmentalisation described in the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code*². From this subpopulation, individual high health-high performance (HHP) horses can be selected. HHP horses are subjected to veterinary and management controls that do not apply to the equine population at large. Horses that are being used for reproduction are not eligible as HHP horses.

The health status of HHP horses is maintained by the application of specific measures pertaining to:

- Veterinary supervision and certification
- Identification and traceability
- Biosecurity at the place of usual residence (home stable), at all places of temporary residence, including equestrian events, and during transport.

HHP horse registration with the industry bodies provides Veterinary Authorities with assurance that a horse is healthy and free from infectious contagious diseases.

This paper describes the implementation of the HHP concept.

1. Phased procedure to register with the HHP system

1.1. 1st Step: Procedure to register premises in the international FEI / IFHA database

a) Health status of country or zone where premises is located

The equine health status of the country or zone is relevant to the registration of premises. Countries and zones should meet the following criteria:

- African horse sickness (AHS), Venezuelan equine encephalomyelitis (VEE), Equine infectious anaemia (EIA), glanders, Western equine encephalomyelitis (WEE), Eastern equine encephalomyelitis (EEE), Japanese encephalomyelitis (JE)³ and rabies³ are notifiable in the country.
- The country has a good record of compliance with its OIE disease reporting obligations (in particular AHS, VEE, EIA, glanders, WEE, EEE, JE, rabies and EI), based on the information on diseases affecting equids provided to the OIE during at least the three years preceding the initial application of premises for qualification. The record with respect to diseases of other species is not taken into account, as this criterion relates to the health status of the domestic equid population.

For the purpose of describing the application of the HHP concept in countries of different health status countries are grouped in four categories.

The first group of countries are those with a well-defined health status and no occurrence of glanders, VEE and AHS. The second group are those countries which cannot substantiate a claim of freedom from glanders, the third group are those countries which cannot substantiate a claim of freedom from VEE and the fourth group is comprised of countries not officially free from AHS. These conditions are described in the HHP Health Certificate as options to choose from, so it is left to the countries to place themselves in the correct category.

² *Terrestrial Code* Chapter 4.16

³ If Japanese encephalitis is not notifiable in a country, the VA must provide evidence that animals are vaccinated; the same applies to rabies

b) Assessment of health status of resident horses in the premises that wish to register on the international database

All horses residing in the premises need to be examined during the 90 days before the registration as follows:

i) Countries of known health status

- Test for EIA
or
Free from EIA
- Vaccinate against EI
or
no clinical signs of EI during the entire approval period
or
Test for presence of protective antibodies (note: more details on protective titers need to be provided for this point to be further elaborated)
or
Country free from EI

ii) Countries that cannot substantiate to be free from glanders⁴

- Same as under i) plus:
- no case of glanders will have occurred within the 6 months of the registration date on the international database and 2 serological tests are to be carried out; the first sample is taken not earlier than 21 days after the start of the approval process and at an interval of at least 21 days to the second sample that is taken within 10 days of approval of the premises

iii) Countries that cannot substantiate to be free from VEE⁴

- Same as under i) plus:
- No clinical cases of VEE in the last 6 months in the premises
and
- All horses are sampled for VEE by serological testing while they are stabled under vector protection during the approval period; and at least 3 weeks before registration of the premises all horses are kept under vector protection at all times; and within 7 days of approval of the premises the horses are then retested for VEE with either a negative result or a stable or declining titre. (Note: it is advisable to register the selected HHP horses with the industry database as soon as possible after the premises is approved in order to avoid excessive length of stabling in vector protection at all times)
or
Vaccination with an inactivated licensed vaccine against VEE of all horses in the premises with primary course at least 60 days prior to the approval of premises and a record of regular revaccination according to manufacturers instructions

⁴ By self-declaration to the OIE or by clear evidence of negative reporting to WAHIS indicative of an existing surveillance programme

iv) Countries not officially free from AHS⁵

- Same as under i) plus:
- All horses are vaccinated 40 days before the introduction into a vector protected stable.
- No clinical signs of AHS upon inspection before introduction into a vector protected stable.
- During the 90 days approval period of the premises one agent identification validated test is done under vector protected stabling, while the last 14 days are managed under the conditions of a quarantine station before a 2nd test is done (note: this is proposed based on the understanding that a quarantine station of the type “Kenilworth” in South Africa is available; hence the premises can be any other stable that provides vector protection, but horses are allowed to train during low vector activity periods of the day, under chemical vector protection).

In addition to these specific tests for the five diseases identified as crucial for the qualification as an HHP horse, the following general requirements need to be fulfilled by the premises in order to apply for registration, regardless to the category described above:

- All horses must have a passport by which they can be clearly identified
- There are no breeding activities in the stable and horses must not be used for breeding
- All horses show no signs of a contagious or infectious disease at the time of registration
- There is a biosecurity plan and a contingency plan in place
- There are isolation stables available

A supervisor dedicated to the premises applying for registration in the international database is designated as responsible for ensuring that all horses fulfil these health criteria. The registration application can then be submitted to the FEI/IFHA, who, if they support the application, request approval of the Veterinary Authority. Once the premises is approved, it will be allocated a registration number from the international database.

The step-wise procedure to register premises can be summarised as follows:

1. On request of a premises / stable operator, who wishes to register his premises as holding a high health status subpopulation on the international database, the Veterinary Authority are informed and they record this intention.
2. An inspection of the Veterinary Services of the premises is undertaken, the Biosecurity measures are examined and the premise is approved as compliant. (Day minus 90).
3. The national Federation/Racing Authority is informed and the premise is registered as holding a high health status subpopulation in the appropriate international database (not yet activated).
4. Start of regular veterinary supervision by accredited veterinarian and testing programme for all resident horses.
5. All new entrants have to come from premises that are under veterinary supervision, did not have a EIA outbreak in the previous 3 months, no glanders outbreak for 6 months and must undergo the same testing as resident horses⁶ before entering the stables undergoing the approval process. Within the stables they must be isolated from the other horses for at least 2 weeks (EI vaccination status must be the same).
6. Registration by the industry of an approved high health status subpopulation in the qualified premises (activate in the database) after official inspection by the Veterinary Authorities (Day 0).

⁵ By submitting a country freedom declaration to the OIE

⁶ If entry after the herd testing – test outside. If entry before herd testing – test together with herd

7. After registration (Day 0) maintain the regular veterinary supervision.
8. Maintenance of approval and registration with the database requires a minimum of annual audit by the Veterinary Authorities.

In addition, the premises has to comply with certain management conditions:

- There is access control for people and other animals to the registered premises
- A daily health and at least a daily temperature check of each horse is carried out by responsible persons dedicated to the stable and these checks are documented
- Procedures for cleaning, disinfection, feeding and horse-management are documented

c) Registration as HHP premises

While under normal circumstances the initial selection of an HHP horse will be from within its stable in the country of usual residence, which has undergone the qualification process as premises holding a high health status horse subpopulation (a compartment), the HHP horse, once its 90-day travel has started, can only reside on premises shared with other HHP horses, hence there is a need to establish also dedicated HHP stables.

These can be sub-units of registered high health status subpopulation premises or be set up particularly for this purpose. The only difference to registered high health subpopulation premises is that they house only HHP horses and that they are isolated from other stables, should there be non-HHP horses on the same premises.

HHP stables also need to be registered in the international database.

1.2 2nd Step: Procedure to register a horse as HHP horse

All horses need to reside in an approved premises, registered in the international database that has undergone the 90-day approval process. They are selected on the basis of having qualified for competitions that are managed under HHP conditions.

For the purpose of explaining the application of the HHP concept, the same different categories of countries apply:

- i) Horses in registered stables⁷ in countries of known health status
 - a) All horses in these premises qualify in principle; they should have the required performance level
 - b) Selected HHP horses should be tested for piroplasmosis to establish the serological status
 - c) After registration of approved premises in the international database, resident horses can be certified as HHP horses, registered in the database and are ready to be presented for inspection by an official veterinarian for health certification purposes and subsequent travel
- ii) Horses in registered stables⁷ in countries that cannot substantiate to be free from glanders
 - a) Horses remain residents in the registered stable after the second sample (Day 0 minus at least 10 days)
 - b) HHP horse registration on Day 0 of premises registration

⁷ “registered stables” refers to premises that have undergone the approval period described in 1.1. and that are registered to hold a high health status subpopulation in the international FEI/ IFHA database

- iv) Horses in registered stables⁷ in countries that cannot substantiate to be free from VEE
 - a) It is advisable to register HHP horses at Day 0 of premises registration; otherwise horses have to remain in vector protection throughout until registration as HHP horse and subsequent travel
- v) Horses in registered stables⁷ in countries not officially free from AHS
 - a) HHP horse registration after 14 days in vector protected quarantine and horses remain in this quarantine station until dispatch⁸

1.3 3rd Step: Intention to travel and application for HHP Health Certificate

After the registration of the horse as an HHP horse in the international database, the official veterinarian can issue the HHP Health Certificate. The official veterinarian should be notified of this intention at least 7 days prior to intended day of inspection.

In case a horse has been registered in the international database as HHP horse and does not travel within 10 days after registration, the entry into the database has to be cancelled.

2. Veterinary supervision

Compliance with the policies and procedures of the HHP concept is assured and validated through continual veterinary supervision of horses at the home stables, during transport and at all temporary venues. This supervision is provided by authorised veterinarians.

2.1. The role of the private veterinarian

The responsibility for veterinary inspection of horses that are intended for qualification as HHP horses (see 1.1 and 1.2) lies with the authorised veterinarian, who is engaged by the owner / Responsible Person to provide veterinary inspection to all horses on the premises. This veterinarian should be registered with the FEI or IFHA (if appropriate) and should preferably be accredited for this purpose by the Veterinary Authority.

The entire approval period towards registration of premises holding high health status horses is under continuous veterinary supervision, defined as being at least one visit per week by the authorised veterinarian. In addition, a veterinary check is carried out on Day 0 of the approval period and a final inspection is done 48 hours before export of the HHP horse.

Records of veterinary supervision should be kept throughout the approval period. In the case that more than one veterinarian is responsible for supervising the period of approval, the supervising veterinarian should make a 'hand over report' to the veterinarian responsible for the subsequent period.

In the course of each veterinary examination of a horse, its passport is checked, its identity verified and the details of any official tests and treatments, including vaccinations, are recorded and signed by the examining veterinarian.

⁸ Batches of horses need to be fully separated and managed as an "all in – all out" system

2.2. The role of the official veterinarian

The Official Veterinarian⁹ should be informed prior to the intended start of the approval period and the end of the 90-day period and also alerted on the date on which a pre-export visit for the purpose of health certification will be required. The Veterinary Authority should be fully informed about the process of preparation of horses for export under the conditions that apply to HHP horses. In accordance with *Terrestrial Code* Article 5.2.2, for the purposes of official certification, the passport is examined, verified and signed by an official veterinarian.

The Veterinary Authority may conduct audits, including unannounced visits, of all parts of the HHP system (home stables and other premises, event venues, stop-over points).

3. The international biosecurity plan

The health status of HHP horses is maintained by ensuring compliance at all times with an international biosecurity plan approved by the Veterinary Authorities of the importing and exporting countries, in accordance with the Biosecurity Guidelines of the OIE. Non-compliance can result in suspension of the horse's membership of the HHP sub-population.

4. Procedures that apply when an HHP horse is not at its place of usual residence

When a HHP horse is not at its place of usual residence (home stable) it may be in the course of transport or at an equestrian event venue. The Biosecurity Guidelines describe the procedures that apply. Key points are summarised below.

4.1. Biosecurity measures and management during transport

Transportation entails the implementation of biosecurity and management in relation to:

- (i) the means of transport, e.g. airplanes, vehicles, trains, boats and
- (ii) temporary holding premises or lay-over points where HHP horses are held during journey breaks. These may be stables, show grounds, veterinary clinics, animal hotels, government quarantine stations or official control points.

HHP horses may only be transported with equids of equivalent or higher health status. Transporters should follow a documented SOP for the transport of HHP horses. Lay-over points should be approved and registered by relevant industry bodies before use by HHP horses. These temporary premises should comply with biosecurity criteria (see 3 above) to avoid the exposure of HHP horses to equids that are not of equivalent health status.

The final decision on the conditions that apply during transport, including the combining of horses in consignments, routes and lay-overs, rests with the Veterinary Authority hosting the equestrian event i.e. of the country into which the horse will be temporarily imported.

4.2. Biosecurity measures and management at HHP equestrian venues

The stables for HHP horses at equestrian events must meet similar criteria to those for HHP registered home stables. They should have dedicated personnel, biosecure arrangements for the provision of feed, and access to isolation facilities.

⁹ In the *Terrestrial Code*, Official Veterinarian means a veterinarian authorised by the Veterinary Authority of the country to perform certain designated official tasks associated with animal health and/or public health and inspections of commodities and, when appropriate, to certify in conformity with the provisions of Chapters 5.1. and 5.2.

5. Return to the country of usual residence

When a HHP horse returns from international competition to the country of usual residence, its status as a member of the HHP may follow one of two options:

- 1) membership of the HHP is maintained, based on compliance with all criteria, or
 - 2) membership of the HHP is suspended. In this case, when the horse is required to regain its active HHP membership, it must follow the procedures outlined above under step 1 and 2 for initial qualification.
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