



Health and Biosecurity Guidelines for Transport of Horses

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This Agriculture Note aims to provide practical advice for the responsible transport of horses. Such transport should reduce the likelihood of illness and spread of disease throughout the horse population.

Introduction

Throughout history horses have been transported long distances for many uses. In fact seven horses sailed to Australia in 1788 on the first fleet! Sickness resulting from such transport or *travel sickness* has been well documented over the centuries.

Nowadays aircraft fly horses around the world regularly - in addition to horse transports whizzing up and down our highways. In the event of an exotic disease such as Equine Influenza occurring in Australia, such rapid transportation poses a serious risk to our horse population by potential widespread dispersal of disease agents.

Responsibilities

Persons involved in transporting horses have a responsibility not only for the horses in their care but also to ensure that spread of diseases to other horses does not occur.

Australia maintains a fortunate position with respect to freedom of many devastating horse diseases. To maintain this status we need to ensure best practice standards with regard to transportation of horses.

Cleanliness and hygiene on board all forms of horse transport is the primary responsibility of the vehicle owner/driver.

Every person involved in transporting horses should ensure horses suffering from disease do not travel without adequate precautions. Not only is travelling likely to worsen the disease, but may also put at risk horses that come into contact with the ill horse or its discharges.

Travel Sickness

“Travel sickness” is the term commonly used to denote the bacterial infection of the lungs and chest cavity in horses that may result from long distance transportation. The condition is technically known as pleuropneumonia, and is not contagious between horses. Other illnesses can also

result from the stress that may be created by travel including enteritis (diarrhoea) and other infections. Serious complications, including laminitis (founder), may occur with often fatal consequences.

Whilst many transporting issues involve common sense, recent studies into the effects of travel on horses have provided valuable information as to the causes of travel sickness.

In particular the stress of transportation over long distances has been shown to affect the immune system leaving the horse vulnerable to disease.

The restricted environment of a horse float or truck may allow build up of noxious gases including exhaust fumes (carbon monoxide) and ammonia (from urine) if not well ventilated. Such toxins cause additional insult to the respiratory system and further stress the horse's general health.



Tips to avoid travel sickness

- Ensure adequate ventilation and avoid exhaust fume contamination of float or truck.
- Allow horse to lower the head during transport.
- Regular breaks (every six to eight hours on long trips) where it is practical and safe to do so.
- Avoid dusty feed during transport, soak hay if necessary.

- Monitor your horse's appetite, demeanour and temperature for several days after prolonged transport.
- If there is any sign of illness such as diarrhoea, nasal discharge, coughing, fever, loss of appetite, founder, or colic, veterinary assistance should be sought.



Avoiding Spread of Infectious Diseases

- Ensure the health status of horses from the property of origin or destination is free of infectious diseases. This is vital step avoid rapid spread of disease.
- Vehicles should be cleaned and disinfected regularly using disinfectants that kill bacteria and viruses.
- Horses should not be loaded on to contaminated vehicles.
- If a disease contagious to horses is known to be present on a property, precautions including veterinary advice should be taken before transporting a horse from that farm to an other horse property.
- Horses should be fit and healthy to travel. Ideally they should have adequate vaccination records for such diseases as strangles and herpes virus.
- Mares in late pregnancy should only be transported with particular care. In addition to minimising any stresses, they should not be mixed with younger stock or recently aborted mares. This is to minimise the chances of the mares contracting viral abortion.
- Sick horses should not be transported unless under veterinary supervision. If it is likely that the condition is contagious, they should not be mixed with other horses without disclosure and consent of other owners or their agents.
- Avoid contact with sick horses at rest stops.

- Accurate records of horse transport movements should be kept.
- Avoid accumulations of manure and urine during and after trips.
- Facilities should be available for high pressure hosing and mucking out of transport vehicles at or close to loading/unloading depots.

Welfare during Transport

The Department of Primary Industries has published a *Code of Practice for the Land Transport of Horses* to provide minimum standards of welfare for the transport of horses in a wide range of situations. The code emphasises the responsibilities of horse owners/agents/drivers/attendants and officials. It is intended to encourage considerate treatment of horses so that the risks of transport stress and injuries are minimised at all stages of the transport operation.

See <http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/dpi/nreninf.nsf/childdocs/>



Further Information

Further information about horse health and welfare issues can be obtained from Animal Health staff at your nearest DPI office or on the DPI website:

<http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/notes>

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