

Salmonella in horses

The Irish Equine Centre has detected far more cases of *Salmonella* in horses in 2022 and so far this year compared to previous years. *Salmonella* is a bacterium which is shed in the faeces of carrier animals and birds and can cause a range of disease presentations in horses.

Clinical signs associated with infection with the *Salmonella* bacterium in horses can vary from inapparent infection to sudden death but most cases in adult horses present with signs of gastrointestinal disease which can be mild or severe. In mild cases, horses have an elevated temperature, are dull, off their feed and have soft faeces or diarrhoea. In severe cases of gastrointestinal disease, horses are far sicker, and the diarrhoea is profuse and often foul-smelling. Horses with severe disease can deteriorate rapidly and become septicaemic without treatment. Foals infected with *Salmonella* may present with diarrhoea, septicaemia or infections of the bones or navel. Two of the cases diagnosed by the Equine Centre this year were from otherwise healthy foals with a swollen joint. If you are concerned that your horse may have a *Salmonella* infection, you should contact your vet to discuss it further.

Salmonella is shed in the faeces of sick animals but also in the faeces of otherwise healthy carrier animals. Contamination of feed, water or the general environment with faeces from such animals, or from infected rodents, birds or livestock are the primary sources of *Salmonella* infection in horses. Rodent-proofing and bird-proofing of stables, feed stores and drinkers are important controls to reduce the risk of *Salmonella* transmission. Regular cleaning out of boxes and stables followed by effective cleaning and disinfection is also important, especially where a case of *Salmonella* is diagnosed. New arrivals at the farm should be tested for *Salmonella* carriage and, when clinical cases occur, it is recommended that all in-contact horses are tested repeatedly to identify any carrier animals in the group which may act as an ongoing source of infection for the rest of the herd.

It is important to remember that *Salmonella* can be transmitted from animals, including horses, to humans and can cause severe illness in the very young, the elderly and immunocompromised individuals. Gloves and other protective clothing should be worn when working with any horse with diarrhoea and hands should be washed and sanitised afterwards.

The Irish Equine Centre will continue to monitor the occurrence of *Salmonella* in horses and is available to advise on control in conjunction with your own vet.

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