



# Horse Fact Sheet

## Occupational Safety and Health Information

### ***General Safety Information for Horse Handlers***

The following information is intended to inform individuals who are involved with the care and use of animals about potential hazards (e.g., zoonoses, allergies, injuries) associated with working with various animal species and to provide information as to how they may lessen these hazards (e.g., personal hygiene, personal protective equipment [PPE]).

### ***Zoonotic Diseases of Horses***

Horses can carry organisms that may cause infection and disease in humans (zoonotic diseases, zoonoses). Exposure to these organisms can come through direct contact with the horse, or indirectly through contact with feces or other bodily fluids or secretions. In general, horses maintained in research/teaching facilities have routine health maintenance (e.g., vaccinations, deworming) and are closely monitored for disease, so the likelihood of disease transmission is greatly reduced. People who handle horses should be aware of a number of important diseases that horses may carry which include: **Rabies**, **Salmonella**, **Leptospirosis**, and **Ringworm**. Some of these diseases may not produce observable signs of illness in the horse; therefore, if you handle horses or their wastes you must take appropriate precautions to prevent transmission of these infections. You can view more information on these agents and other agents in [Appendix C](#) of the university Infection Prevention Program and the [Occupational Safety and Health Program for Animal Handlers](#). Please see the [Rabies Fact Sheet](#) for guidance on how to respond if there is a suspect exposure event.

### ***Injuries from Handling Horses***

Horses respond to gentle handling. Horses are herd animals that prefer to stay with their herd, and may resist being moved to strange territory. They do not like sudden or fast movements and may stop suddenly, rear up or buck, and may also kick and bite. Physical injuries to handlers such as back strain can occur from handling and restraining horses due to their large size and strength; therefore, handlers with pre-existing back or joint problems may need assistance when working with horses. It is essential that people who handle horses for research or teaching are provided with training in proper handling techniques in order to avoid injury to themselves or the animals, such specific handling and restraint techniques, and protective clothing requirements.

### ***Allergic Reactions to Horses***

The hair and skin flakes of horses can be sources of allergens (protein materials which cause an allergic reaction in people). The signs associated with these allergies may include sneezing, stuffy nose (congestion), itchy and watery eyes, and skin rash/itching.

## **How to Protect Yourself**

**Wash your Hands:** The single most effective preventative measure that can be taken is thorough, regular hand washing. Wash hands and arms after handling horses. Never eat, drink or smoke in animal areas.

**Wear Personal Protective Equipment:** Coveralls and covered shoes (no open-toed shoes or sandals are allowed) should always be worn when working with horses. Dust masks should be worn if you have a history of allergies, if you are inside in dusty areas, or during grooming. Respiratory protection (mask or respirator) should be worn during necropsy if there is a risk of aerosol transmission of a zoonotic disease. Employees who need to wear respiratory protection must be medically cleared by Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) before being fit tested with a respirator (if applicable). Complete the [medical survey form](#) to start this process if you are an employee. Students will be fit tested by EHS after providing our medical staff a note from your primary care physician, or after signing an 'informed consent' form at the time of service.

**Tell your Physician you work with Horses:** Whenever you are ill, even if you are not certain that the illness is work related, always mention to your physician that you work with horses. Many zoonotic diseases have flu-like symptoms and would not normally be suspected. Your physician needs this information to make an accurate diagnosis. Questions about personal human health should be answered by your physician.

**Seek Medical Attention Promptly:** If you are injured on the job (e.g., bitten, kicked, stepped on) provide immediate first-aid. Stop the bleeding of wounds and wash the affected areas with soap and water. For fieldwork where soap and water may not be readily available, use of baby wipes (available in small portable packages) or alcohol-based cleansing gel is acceptable. Alcohol-based gels are neutralized by organic matter so the first application should be wiped off to remove debris, or the area can be cleaned first with a baby wipe, and the next application of gel can be left on the skin.

- Immediately report the incident to the facility director, your supervisor, or the teaching instructor if applicable.
- Those individuals needing immediate medical treatment for serious injuries may visit an appropriate healthcare provider for treatment (e.g., emergency room, primary care physician, students may also be treated at Student Health Services). Immediate medical treatment may be required if:
  - An individual's ability to breath properly is affected;
  - Bleeding is excessive and difficult to control;
  - An injury clearly needs sutures; or
  - There is a loss of consciousness associated with the incident.
- If you are working with a purposefully infected animal, the individual seeking medical attention must take a Hazard Summary sheet or agent SDS and present them to the healthcare provider prior to receiving services. It is important that the healthcare provider be made aware of the hazards present in the facility in order to appropriately diagnose and treat an individual.

- Employees' supervisor completes an [Employers' Accident Report](#) within 24 hours of the incident for employees. This document is specific to the Workers Compensation Program and is required prior to any follow-up medical services being provided for employees.
- The facility director or manager completes a General Incident Report form to be used by the facility director, facility manager, and Environmental Health & Safety for review of the incident.