



# Horses

The Occupational Health Program is designed to inform individuals who work with animals about potential zoonoses (diseases transmitted to humans from animals), personal hygiene and other potential hazards associated with animal exposure. This information sheet is directed toward those involved in the care and use of horses.

## Potential Injury and Zoonotic Diseases

Horses are large farm animals that respond to gentle handling. Horses are herd animals and creatures of habit and prefer to stay with their herd and resist being moved to strange territory. They do not like surprises or fast movement and express their dislike by pinning back their ears or swishing their tails. They can deliver swift kicks and will bite. Ergonomic injuries such as back strain can occur from handling and restraining horses due to their size and strength; therefore individuals with pre-existing back or joint problems may need assistance when working with horses.

The zoonotic diseases associated with care and handling of horses include the following:

**Rabies:** Rabies is a fatal infectious disease of people and other mammals caused by a virus. Rabies affects the nervous system. Infection is primarily acquired from the bite of an infected mammal. The virus is present in the saliva of the rabid animal. People can also get infected when saliva gets directly into the eyes, nose, mouth or a wound. It is important to recognize that domestic animals can get infected and transmit the disease. Rabies is a fatal disease and the primary goal is to prevent infection. Symptoms usually develop 10 days to 7 months after exposure, and can result in death 2-12 days later. Behavioral changes and unexplained paralysis are most indicative of rabies. Signs include anorexia, apprehension, nervousness, irritability, hyper-excitability, ataxia, change in voice, uncharacteristic aggressiveness, seeking solitude. In the **furious** form the animal becomes very aggressive and vicious whereas the **paralytic** form is associated with profuse salivation and inability to swallow due to muscle paralysis. Wild animals will often display abnormal behaviors and loose fear of people and other animals.

[Click here for more information.](#)

**Salmonella:** Salmonellosis is a bacterial disease caused by the bacterium *Salmonella*. Many different kinds of *Salmonella* can make people sick. Most people have diarrhea, fever, and stomach pain that start 1 to 3 days after they get infected. These symptoms usually go away after 1 week. Sometimes, people have to see a doctor or go to the hospital because the diarrhea is severe or the infection has affected their organs. Animals can carry *Salmonella* and pass it in their feces.

People get salmonellosis if they do not wash their hands after touching the feces of animals. [Click here for more information.](#)

**Anthrax:** Anthrax is a serious disease caused by *Bacillus anthracis*, a bacterium that forms spores. Humans can become infected with anthrax by handling products from infected animals or by breathing in anthrax spores from infected animal products. There are three types of anthrax: cutaneous (skin), inhalation (lungs) and gastrointestinal (digestive). The symptoms of anthrax depend on the route of infection or type. Cutaneous anthrax presents with a small sore that becomes a blister. The blister then develops into a skin ulcer with a black area in the center. The sore, blister and ulcer do not hurt. Inhalation anthrax symptoms are similar to the cold or flu and can include a sore throat, mild fever, and muscle aches. Later symptoms include cough, chest discomfort, shortness of breath, tiredness and muscle aches. Gastrointestinal anthrax symptoms are nausea, loss of appetite, bloody diarrhea, and fever, followed by stomach pain. Symptoms for all three types generally appear within 7 days of contact. Anthrax can be treated if detected early by antibiotic therapy. [Click here for more information.](#)

**Other diseases:** Other diseases that can be spread through working with horses are [brucellosis](#), [leptospirosis](#), [cryptosporidiosis](#), [giardia](#), [salmonellosis](#) and [campylobacter](#) through the fecal-oral route.

## Allergic Reactions

The hair and dander of the horse can be a source of allergies. Proteins secreted by oil glands in an animal's skin as well as the proteins present in an animal's saliva, can cause allergic reactions in some people. Allergies to animals can take two or more years to develop and symptoms may not subside until months after ending contact with the animal. Symptoms include sneezing, coughing and itchy and watery eyes. It can also cause skin rash and itching.

## How to Protect Yourself

- Wear gloves and wash your hands.
- Wear respiratory protection. If respiratory protection is worn, it is mandatory that individuals enroll in the Respiratory Protection Program through EHS.
- Wear protective clothing. Avoid wearing street clothes when working with animals.
- Seek medical attention if you are injured. Contact your supervisor and Occupational Health and Safety to be instructed as to where to go to seek medical attention.
- Enroll in the Occupational Health and Safety Program. Update your information on an annual basis to ensure proper medical surveillance.