

Welfare of Equids: Guidance

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Part 1: Core principles and legal duties

Introduction

Purpose of the guidance

This guidance applies in Scotland only. It is issued by the Scottish Ministers under section 38 of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 with a view to securing the welfare of equids. It was developed through collaboration across the Scottish equine sector, led by the Scottish Government and the National Equine Welfare Council. This guidance is intended to help all those who care for equids to ensure that their fundamental health and welfare needs are met. The welfare of equids – including horses, donkeys and their hybrids – is a fundamental responsibility of all those who own, manage, or care for them.

An animal's quality of life can be classified as a life not worth living, a life worth living, and a good life. This guidance is intended to help those responsible for equids to provide them with, as a minimum, a life worth living, as well as encouraging owners and keepers to take measures that will truly provide their horse, pony or donkey with a good life.

This guidance is aimed at those who own, manage or care for any horses, ponies, donkeys and their hybrids. Throughout this document the term **equid** will refer to any horse, pony, donkey or hybrid. Where there is a specific point relating to a horse, donkey or a hybrid, this will be clearly explained.

Who it applies to

This guidance is designed to support all those who keep or care for equids, for any purpose including sport, showing, leisure or environmental conservation. This guidance will support the keeping of all equids, and will provide all those responsible including owners, keepers and professionals, with direction in maintaining high standards of equid care, aligning with scientific best practices, ethical considerations and legal obligations. By adopting these principles, we can ensure that all equids experience a life worth living, with positive welfare outcomes at every stage of their lives.

Evolutionary needs

Equids today have similar biological and behavioural needs to those that evolved on the plains, mountains and deserts over four million years ago. Traditional management practices where animals are prevented from forming social bonds and even from having social contact with other equids, provided feed and forage at set mealtimes or given free access to relatively high energy forage and/or pasture, and prevented from moving freely, have a significant negative impact on their welfare. While managing our equids we always need to keep in mind this evolutionary

hardwiring and strive to provide them with companionship, forage and freedom to support a life worth living with the aim to provide a truly good life.

Horses

The horse evolved in a plains or steppe-like environment with wide open spaces and a landscape of mixed, fibrous vegetation of low nutritional value. They roamed large distances, grazing and browsing almost continuously while also seeking water, minerals, rolling opportunities and shelter when needed, as well as resting and sleeping. To stay safe and find food, horses formed groups based on strong social bonds. These bonds were further strengthened by specific affiliative behaviours such as mutual grooming, close resting, and coordinated movement. Maintaining proximity to familiar companions offered safety, encouraged learning, and reduced stress. Such social structures remain central to horses' wellbeing today, with isolation or unstable groupings often leading to compromised welfare.



Horses in a field. Image supplied and permission for use granted by World Horse Welfare.

Donkeys

Donkeys evolved browsing and grazing in even more sparse desert-like environments. They lived individually, in pairs or in small groups with group size determined by the amount of food and water available. They tended to stay within the vicinity of an important resource, such as a watering hole. Where resources allow, donkeys form strong social bonds with other donkeys, including in domestic situations.



Donkeys grazing in a field. Image supplied and permission for use granted by The Donkey Sanctuary.

Mules and hinnies

A cross between a horse and donkey with unique physiological and behavioural characteristics that they inherit from both parents. As with both horses and donkeys, the social needs of hybrids must be prioritised with hybrids generally preferring the company of other hybrids or their maternal species.

Legal responsibilities

Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 (the “2006 Act”)

The purpose of Part 2 of the 2006 Act is to promote the welfare of animals and prevent harm. To cause any animal unnecessary suffering is an offence under section 19 of the 2006 Act.

Under section 24 of the 2006 Act, any person responsible for an animal must take such steps as are reasonable in the circumstances to ensure that their needs are met **to the standard required by good practice**. Although this guidance does not have legislative effect, it is intended to promote and give examples of good practice. The welfare advice in this guidance may also be considered relevant by the courts in any prosecution of offences under sections 19 (unnecessary suffering) and 24 (ensuring welfare of animals) of the 2006 Act. The relevance of the guidance to any

prosecution will depend on the facts and circumstances and, in some cases, the guidance may not have any bearing on the prosecution.

The circumstances to which regard is to be had under section 24, include any lawful purpose for which the animal is kept and any lawful activity undertaken in relation to the animal. Section 24 does not apply to the destruction of an animal in an appropriate and humane manner.

The needs of an animal include:

- a) their need for a suitable environment,
- b) their need for a suitable diet,
- c) their need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns,
- d) any need they have to be housed with, or apart from, other animals,
- e) their need to be protected from suffering, injury, and disease.

Failure to meet these obligations may be an offence under the 2006 Act.

Responsibility for animals

Section 18 of the 2006 Act defines a person as responsible for an animal if they have charge of it on a permanent or temporary basis. This includes owners, livery yard operators, transporters, and anyone else who is permanently or temporarily in charge of the animal.

Individuals are considered responsible for an equid if they own or are in charge of it. Important points include that:

- an owner is always regarded as responsible for an animal even if another person is providing daily care,
- a person does not relinquish responsibility for an animal by reason only of abandoning it,
- a parent or guardian is responsible for any equid for which a person under 16 is responsible.

Owners should therefore ensure that any individual entrusted with temporary care is competent and has authority to act in an emergency.

Anyone responsible for an equid should:

- understand the health and welfare needs of the animal,
- comply with relevant legislation,
- know when and how to seek advice from qualified professionals (e.g. veterinary surgeons and nurses, farriers and allied professionals). Relevant link here:

Employing Allied Professionals (and other service providers) - National Equine Welfare Council.

Each animal may have additional, individual needs beyond the basic requirements outlined in this Guidance. If unsure, owners or keepers should seek advice from appropriate sources.

Recommended organisations include:

- British Horse Society - www.bhs.org.uk.
- World Horse Welfare – www.worldhorsewelfare.org.
- The Donkey Sanctuary - www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk.
- The Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals - www.scottishspca.org.
- Redwings Horse Sanctuary - www.redwings.org.uk.
- Blue Cross - www.bluecross.org.uk.
- National Equine Welfare Council – www.newc.co.uk.

For competition horses, further advice should be obtained from the relevant disciplinary bodies or governing authorities.

Identification and passports

The Animal (Identification) (Scotland) Regulations 2019 (the “2019 Regulations”) make provision to implement and enforce Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2015/262. Together, they set out the rules in relation to the identification of equids.

All equids must have an equine passport. In Scotland, the responsibility for applying for a passport lies with the keeper, who is usually the owner. It is a legal requirement for all equids to be microchipped.

The passport:

- assists in preventing equids treated with certain veterinary medicines from entering the food chain,
- helps to prevent the sale of stolen animals,
- ensures accurate identification and links the equid permanently to their passport via microchip.

Microchipping and transponder insertion

Microchipping became mandatory for all equids from 28 March 2021. It is a legal requirement that microchips (transponders) must only be inserted by a veterinary surgeon registered with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS).

Microchipping:

- establishes a permanent link between an equid and their passport,
- aids in the recovery of stolen or abandoned equids,
- facilitates enforcement in welfare cases.



A mule in a stable being held and scanned to check for a microchip. Image supplied and permission for use granted by World Horse Welfare.

Passport contents and use

Each passport includes:

- unique equid life number (UELN),
- microchip code number,
- silhouette / markings and site of microchip implantation,
- owners' details,
- breed/type and age,
- vaccination history,
- record of food chain eligibility.

The passport is not an ownership document. It is an identification document and a veterinary record. Passports must accompany the equid at all times, except in the limited circumstances permitted in legislation.

Applying for a passport

Passport application forms are available from authorised passport issuing organisations (PIOs). A passport issued by an unauthorised body is not valid. PIOs must comply with the standards set out in the official guidance: [Horse passports: Minimum Operating Standards \(MOpS\) for Passport Issuing Organisations \(PIOs\) - gov.scot](#).

Application deadlines

If applying to a PIO in Scotland, your application must be received no later than 30 days prior to the deadline, which is the later of:

- 31 December in the year of birth, or
- End of the month that is six months after the animal's birth.

ScotEquine card

The ScotEquine card is a secure, plastic ID card containing statutory details. It:

- is issued by the same body that issued the equid's passport,
- can accompany the equid during transport within Scotland as an alternative to the paper passport.

ScotEquine cards provide an exception to the general rule that passports must accompany equids at all times. However, it does not replace the passport and cannot be used for:

- moving an equid to slaughter,
- the sale or transfer of ownership.

Movement restrictions without a passport

Equids must not be moved without a valid passport or, where applicable, a ScotEquine card. For example, without a passport or ScotEquine card, equids cannot be:

- moved to participate in a competition,
- ridden or driven away from the home premises (unless in the vicinity of those premises or during seasonal movement to or from registered summer grazing ground and provided that the passport or smartcard can be produced without undue delay),
- permanently moved from the place of birth (unless they are foals at foot with their dam).

Slaughter and food chain eligibility

An equid can only be slaughtered for human consumption if:

- it is accompanied by a valid passport, and

- the appropriate section of the passport confirms it is intended for human consumption.

In Section II, Part II of the passport, there is a declaration to indicate if the equid is not intended for slaughter for human consumption. Part II, Section IX in pre-2016 issued passports are different in that they require a signature to confirm that either the animal is intended for human consumption or that the animal is not intended for human consumption. If this declaration is not signed, the equid is to be treated as though it is intended for human consumption. In certain circumstances the declaration must be signed to declare the equid as not intended for slaughter for human consumption. Declarations that indicate that an equid is 'not intended for slaughter for human consumption' cannot be reversed.

For all equids eligible to enter the food chain, a registered (UK Practising) veterinary surgeon must record all the medicinal products containing "essential substances" (substances essential or bringing added clinical benefit for the treatment of equids listed in Regulation (EC) No 1950/2006) in the passport, as this may affect slaughter eligibility.

Selling or buying an equid

If buying an equid, you should ensure that you obtain the passport from the previous keeper, as the passport will need to be updated to reflect your new ownership. Failure to update the passport with new ownership details is an offence.

If you purchase an equid, you must lodge the updated passport with the relevant passport issuing organisation (PIO) within 30 days of the change in ownership.

Report attempts to sell an equid without a passport to Trading Standards.

Importing and Exporting

Equids imported from the EU must have a valid passport issued by an authorised EU PIO. If the equid is to stay in the UK for longer than 90 days, its passport must be sent to a UK PIO within 30 days of arrival.

Death of an Equid

If your equid dies, you must return the passport to the issuing body within 30 days of its death. Failure to return the passport is an offence.

You may request the passport be returned after invalidation for personal records.

If the equid is slaughtered at an abattoir, the abattoir is responsible for returning the passport within 30 working days.

What is equid welfare?

An equid's welfare represents how they feel at a particular moment or over a period of time and can be measured on a scale from very good to very poor. An equid's welfare is determined by both their physical health and mental state, with the balance of positive to negative experiences reflected in their emotional state.

All equids have three fundamental behavioural needs - the 3 F's: Friends, Forage, and Freedom - which are essential for supporting normal behaviours and promoting positive emotions. Restricting one or more of the 3 F's can trigger a stress response and cause emotional distress, the severity of which depends not only on the degree of restriction but also on various other factors that influence how the equid feels. While there are often practical limitations that may restrict full access to all three needs, which can prevent an equid from living its best possible life, even small changes to management practices can have a positive impact on equid welfare.

The internationally recognised Five Domains Model of Animal Welfare Assessment framework ensures a comprehensive approach to equid well-being by addressing how nutrition, physical environment, health and behavioural interactions impact on the fifth domain- mental state.

The Five Domains of Animal Welfare:

1. **Nutrition** – Equids require a diet that meets their physiological and behavioural needs, ensuring access to appropriate forage, fresh water, and a feeding regime that promotes good physical and mental health.
2. **Environment** – The living environment should provide shelter, space and conditions that promote safety, rest, freedom of movement and minimising exposure to hazards or extreme weather.
3. **Health** – Preventative healthcare, including routine veterinary checks, vaccination, parasite control, hoof care, and dental care is essential to maintaining physical well-being. Timely intervention is crucial when signs of illness, injury, or distress arise.
4. **Behavioural Interactions** – This is further broken down into three subsections:
 - a. Interactions with other animals: Management practices should prevent boredom, frustration or social isolation. Equids are social animals with natural behaviours that must be accommodated, including opportunities for social interaction, exercise and mental stimulation.
 - b. Interactions with the environment: Equids thrive when living in varied and enriched environments that they can engage with to learn, develop appropriate skills and reduce boredom.

- c. Interactions with people: Equids should experience more positive experiences in their interactions with people than negative ones, this includes riding and training, where appropriate, but also general handling.
5. **Mental State** – Each of the first four domains influences the equid's mental state, generating either positive or negative experiences. By ensuring safety, security and choice, and by meeting species-appropriate needs such as social bonds, movement, and forage, keepers can minimise stress, fear or discomfort. Positive, low-stress interactions with people are especially important for both equid welfare and human safety. In this way, equids can feel secure, content, and able to express natural behaviours, thriving in the life provided for them.

Owners and keepers should focus on promoting positive experiences and minimising negative experiences for their equids. To find out more about the 5 Domains of animal welfare please visit - [The Five Domains of animal welfare - World Horse Welfare](#).

The welfare of an equid and their overall quality of life is determined by the balance between positive and negative emotional experiences. While some unpleasant experiences may occur for health or welfare reasons, it is essential that such experiences are minimised wherever possible.

Owners and keepers should not only be aiming to reduce negative experience, but striving to provide opportunities to meet equid needs effectively and provide positive experiences. Allowing equids to have choice/agency within their lives is crucial in providing them with a good life. When equids are denied the opportunity to meet their own needs or resolve stressors themselves at the time of their experience, these repeated negative experiences can become prolonged leading to chronic stress, ultimately compromising both mental and physical welfare. Persistent negative states may also reduce the equid's capacity to engage in positive experiences.

Equids that experience a greater balance of positive over negative mental states are more resilient to stress, physically healthier and better able to cope with challenges. They are likely to be more adaptable, recover more quickly from setbacks and injury and build stronger bonds with people and other equids. Such animals do not just achieve a life worth living but move towards a good life, where they can thrive through security, confidence and the expression of species-specific behaviours. Providing positive experiences also benefits owners and keepers - equids in good mental states are usually easier and safer to handle, more trainable, more consistent in performance and less likely to incur veterinary costs.

Professional support

Veterinarians, equid veterinary nurses and allied professionals play a vital role in supporting owners and keepers of equids to safeguard and prioritise equid welfare.

Through preventative healthcare, timely diagnosis and treatment, and clear, evidence-based advice, they help promote good management, early intervention and responsible decision-making. By working collaboratively across disciplines and building trusting relationships with owners and keepers, these professionals support high standards of care, advocate for the equid's needs and promote welfare-focused outcomes throughout every stage of an equid's life. Owners and keepers should ensure that any allied professional they use is appropriately qualified and insured, and where appropriate registered.

Part 2: Daily care and management

Each section:

- includes practical guidance,
- sets out examples of good practice that all those responsible for equids should follow to ensure the needs of equids are met and to attempt to provide them with a high standard of living.

In some sections of the guidance, examples of enhanced (aspirational) management measures that could be considered as going beyond “good practice” are provided. These additional measures are provided to support those who own or care for equids and who may wish to go further to promote or enhance equid welfare and overall quality of life. They are separate from the good practice set out in this guidance and which is intended to assist those responsible for an equid in meeting the requirements of section 24 of the 2006 Act.

Feeding and nutrition

Forage-based diet

Equids are herbivores that have evolved to forage (browse and graze) for the majority of the day, moving around constantly while grazing or searching for browse. They are naturally trickle feeders and their digestive system is best adapted to having an almost continuous intake of small amounts of fibrous food passing through. Forage includes grass, hay, haylage, safe browse and straw.



A group of horses grazing in a field with additional foraging opportunities, in the form of a tree branch with leaves on. Image supplied and permission for use granted by D Pollard.

To try and mimic natural feeding behaviours and maintain a positive mental state, equids should have constant access to appropriate quality forages and be able to browse for a minimum of 14 hours a day. Extended fasting periods of longer than 3 - 4 hours should be avoided. Extended fasting periods can contribute to digestive diseases and a poor mental state. Ensuring regular forage intake supports gut health and satisfies their natural foraging behaviour.



A group of horses in a field eating hay from a hay feeder. Image supplied and permission for use granted by World Horse Welfare.

Equids should have variety in their diet and the ability to make choices. This can be achieved by giving equids access to different types of forage, such as hay, haylage and straw, to choose from, by providing their daily forage in different locations and spreading it out in small piles, or using different types of hay nets and feeders. This has the additional advantage of mimicking their natural grazing pattern. Further variety can be included by providing safe access to hedgerows in their field or providing branches and/or novel fruit and vegetables of varying tastes and textures in the stable. Donkeys are more suited to a “higher fibre” diet, predominantly consisting of straw or straw based chops with supplementary hay, haylage and grazing as body-condition and needs dictate.

Good practice:

- Equids must be fed an appropriate and adequate diet that maintains good physical and mental health.
- Equids should have access to forage for the majority of the 24 hour day (minimum 14 hours per 24 hour period).
- Owners and keepers should avoid allowing equids in their care to go for prolonged periods without access to forage (never more than 4 hours).
- Donkeys should be fed high fibre, low sugar/starch forages (such as straw for donkeys with good dentition) and should ideally be fed on a continuous access basis.

- Equids should not be fed grass cuttings which can be fatal and often contains plant species which are not suitable/poisonous.
- Equids should have their feeding management adapted based on individual requirements (age, weight, breed, health, workload).
- Equids should have any new forages or feeds introduced gradually over a period of at least two weeks to allow the microbes in the gut time to adjust.
- Owners and keepers should manage their equid's seasonal weight fluctuations carefully, with feeding adjusted to account for pasture availability and environmental conditions.
- Owners and keepers should monitor their equid's behaviour to ensure they are engaging in foraging behaviours.
- Equids should be managed within a healthy weight range and body condition score (fat score) through adjustment of diet and exercise. Links to relevant information:
[How to Body Condition Score - Horses and Ponies.](#)
[How to Body Condition Score - Donkeys.](#)
- If equids rely solely on pasture, nutrient intake should be monitored, with restrictions, alternatives and supplementary feeding required at different times of the year depending on the equid's health and weight.
- Conserved forage should be of good quality with haylage bales remaining airtight until feeding to prevent spoilage.
- Owners and keepers should consider group dynamics to ensure all equids have adequate and safe access to forage.
- Owners and keepers should maintain a minimum of two equid body lengths between feeding points when feeding equids in groups to reduce competition-related injuries.
- Owners and keepers should provide one feeding point per equid, plus a minimum of one additional feeding point to prevent resource guarding.
- Owners and keepers should keep feeding stations at a suitable distance from other resources such as water and resting/shelter areas so that equids are not prevented from accessing these other resources.



A donkey eating straw. Image supplied and permission for use granted by The Donkey Sanctuary.

Enhanced management measures:

- Where possible, equids should have access to ad libitum forage when they are not being actively ridden/trained to promote mental wellbeing and digestive health. This should be of various forage types and of appropriate quality to maintain a healthy weight.
- Grazing should consist of species diverse pasture where possible.
- Equids should have opportunities for browsing, by placing forage in places where it mimics browsing behaviour or provided by natural browse.
- Owners and keepers should consider ways to slow down consumption and mimic natural foraging. Ways to enrich the foraging experience include offering equids different sources of forage at different heights and/or within different types of suitable equipment (e.g. small-holed hay-nets, forage boxes, loose on the ground), with the majority of forage being provided at ground level. However, care should be taken not to induce frustration.
- Owners and keepers should facilitate foraging to take place in a group setting where possible, allowing for social interactions between equids, natural movement and grazing behaviours.
- Owners and keepers should use food reward toys cautiously, as they can cause frustration in some equids or create conflict in group housing.

Watering

On average an equid will typically drink around 15 – 40 litres of water per day. This rate may vary depending on several factors, such as size, diet, weather, exercise, lactation and health status. Providing water in a way that supports equids' social and behavioural needs, for example, opportunities to drink simultaneously within compatible social groups, or the use of troughs that allow for natural drinking postures and social interaction, can contribute to both positive welfare and the expression of normal behaviours.



A group of horses in a field, with one drinking water from a bucket. Image supplied and permission for use granted by D Pollard.

Good practice:

- Equids should have regular access to safe, palatable and clean water in quantities to maintain health and hydration.
- Owners and keepers should take extra precautions during extreme weather conditions to ensure sufficient water availability.
- Equids should have constant and unrestricted access to water when at rest.
- Owners and keepers should not withhold access to water at any time.
- Owners and keepers should provide water in a way that supports equids' social and behavioural needs.

- Owners and keepers should provide a continuous water supply that allow equids to drink freely via natural water sources, automatic drinkers, troughs or buckets.
- Owners and keepers should consider that increased water intake may be necessary based on diet, exercise, lactation and environmental conditions.
- Owners and keepers should provide troughs and buckets of an appropriate size to ensure enough water for all equids and be positioned in a way as to prevent the risk of entrapment.
- Owners and keepers should clean and inspect water troughs, buckets and automatic drinkers regularly, checking for damage/leaks and prevent algae buildup.
- Owners and keepers should securely fix water troughs to prevent displacement and ensure that they have no sharp edges or exposed taps.
- Owners and keepers should test natural water sources such as streams for mineral content and contaminants. An alternative water supply should be made available if necessary.
- Owners and keepers should ensure that access to natural water sources is safe, with firm footing and multiple access points for large groups.
- Owners and keepers should consider the provision of warmed water at times of extreme cold, especially for geriatric equids who may be more reluctant to drink cold water.



A group of donkeys drinking from a large water container. Image supplied and permission for use granted by The Donkey Sanctuary.

Supplementary feeding

Supplementary feeds include concentrate feedstuffs and should be fed in addition to forage when necessary. Most equids in light, medium or heavy work, or companion animals, can meet their energy needs through quality forage alone provided that they are in good health.

Good practice:

- Equids on a forage-based diet of unknown nutritional value or diets of a single forage type may require a balancer or vitamin and mineral supplements to provide essential nutrients not available in forage.
- Equids should be provided with additional fortified forage (chaff or pellets) if forage quality or quantity is insufficient or if they are unable to manage long stem forages due to dental disease.
- Owners and keepers should provide forage or fibre-based feed prior to exercise - concentrated feeds containing high levels of sugar and starch should not be given at least one hour before exercise.

Feeding management for health and welfare

Improper nutrition can cause painful, life-limiting conditions affecting both physical and mental well-being.

Good practice:

- Owners and keepers should avoid overfeeding or underfeeding to maintain a healthy body condition.
- Owners and keepers should recognise key health and welfare signs related to nutrition, including:
 - change in body condition score,
 - deterioration in hoof quality or the appearance of unexplained hoof rings,
 - change in droppings amount and consistency,
 - behavioural changes,
 - recurring mild colic episodes.
- Owners and keepers should seek professional guidance when needed.
- Overweight and underweight equids require structured weight management programs and/or dental health assessments, guided by a veterinary surgeon, qualified dental technicians or other allied professions such as veterinary nurses and nutritionists, with careful risk management.
- Owners and keepers should monitor bodyweight regularly, ideally monthly, using species specific weigh tapes, BCS charts, and physical assessments.
- Equids with a history of laminitis or metabolic disorders may require strict dietary management, including limited access to pasture and reduced sugar and starch intake. This should only be undertaken with veterinary support and specialist nutritional advice. It is important to note that equids still need to be provided with forage for the majority of the day so owners and keepers will

need to find ways of managing sugar and starch intake whilst providing foraging opportunities.

Living out, turnout and opportunities for movement

Equids are adaptable to living in a variety of weather conditions and can be kept in variable management settings, with 24/7 outside living (with access to shelters) being optimum for most equids. However, they need to be managed and cared for within a safe and appropriate environment. Wherever they are kept, whether living out full-time or turned out for part of the day, or housed in barns, shelters or stables, the environment must meet the needs of the individual animals. This means taking into account their physical and behavioural requirements and preferences, in particular their need for space, companionship and forage.



A group of horses living out in a large grassy field. Image supplied and permission for use granted by The Horse Trust.

Freedom of movement

Regular, if not constant, opportunities for freedom of movement and access to foraging opportunities is vital to promote good equid welfare. Freedom of movement refers to times when equids have adequate space to move freely at all gaits outside of human-led exercise. Free-ranging equids cover distances of 10 to 40 km daily to fulfil their foraging and other needs; however domesticated equids are often kept in

environments that restrict free movement. Owners and keepers have a duty to ensure sufficient daily opportunities for free movement and expression of natural behaviours. Equids can be kept in a variety of outdoor systems such as traditional fields, tracks and pasture systems.



Two donkeys walking on a sandy track, which is fenced in. Image supplied and permission for use granted by The Donkey Sanctuary.

Good practice:

- Equids should be kept within a safe and secure environment free from hazards.
- Owners and keepers should ensure that fencing and boundaries are secure and well maintained.
- Equids should have access to clean areas of grazing and/or forage free from faeces.
- Equids should have free movement opportunities daily, even if receiving human-led exercise.
- Equids should be given as much access as possible to outside areas for free movement, with thought given as to whether they can live outside either year-round or at certain times of year if 24/7 access is not possible.
- Owners and keepers should provide turnout and living out areas of adequate space to allow for all equids to move freely at all gaits and exhibit normal behaviours.
- Equids should be turned out in socially compatible groups: being social animals, the opportunity for social contact is very important for welfare. This

includes stallions, who with the right introduction and management can be kept in socially compatible groups.

- Owners and keepers should manage the introduction of new animals to groups carefully. Where group living is not possible, equids should be in sight and ideally able to physically touch each other.
- Owners and keepers should consider planning for seasonal variation in relation to pasture and outside living access so that at all times of year equids have a well-drained, mud free area in which to feed and lie down.
- Owners and keepers should manage high traffic areas which are prone to poaching, such as gateways or areas around water troughs, to prevent them from becoming a health and safety risk to equids or handlers.
- Equids should have choice to move between different areas, i.e., the choice to be inside or outside in differing weather conditions. Owners and keepers should provide equids with access to both shelter and turnout to offer choice and agency.
- Where daily freedom of movement is not possible, owners and keepers should provide human-led exercise, in-hand, ridden, driven, or via a horse walker. Unless restricted movement has been advised as part of veterinary treatment of an injury or illness.



A grass track system with horses grazing. Image supplied and permission for use granted by T Coombs.

Enhanced management measures:

- Owners and keepers should aim to keep groups stable (in terms of new equids being introduced or others being removed) as much as possible, to promote welfare and lower the risk of injury to animals and handlers.

Pasture management

A good pasture management programme is essential for supporting equid health and welfare. It helps prevent overgrazing, supports parasite control, improves pasture quality and drainage and aids in weed control.

Good practice:

- Owners and keepers should ensure that faeces are picked up regularly (at least weekly) to help control internal parasites and maintain pasture hygiene, unless animals are kept on large and extensive areas of grazing where this may not be required.
- Owners and keepers should ensure that a biosecurity risk assessment is undertaken with a veterinary professional before any new equid is introduced to the grazing area and faecal egg tested before being turned out. Any equid deemed to be of high risk or those of an unknown health status should be quarantined. (See Appendix 1 - Equid centred quarantine and isolation plan).
- Owners and keepers should have a management plan in place where paddocks are regularly rotated and allowed to rest.
- Owners and keepers should ensure that pastures are free from poisonous plants (such as ragwort, privet, box, leylandii, yew, broom). At certain times of year i.e. spring/autumn – some tree species (for example: oak; sycamore) should be fenced off to prevent equids from eating parts of the tree but particularly seeds/seedlings.
- Where grazing areas are adjacent to residential housing, measures should be taken to prevent access to garden waste, particularly lawn clippings, which may contain toxic plants or pose a risk.

Enhanced management measures:

- Owners and keepers should harrow and roll fields yearly, if required, to remove dead grass and shallow-rooted weeds at a time when the field is not being used for grazing.
- Owners and keepers should look to improve and maintain soil health and encourage biodiversity within pastures where possible – this may include the need to reseed or over-sow pastures with appropriate meadow grass mixes to restore sward health.
- Where appropriate, owners and keepers can support pasture improvement and reduce worm burdens by grazing cattle or sheep in rotation with equids.
- Grazing areas should ideally be rested for 6 months.

Shelter provision

Shelter is essential to protect equids from adverse weather conditions, including wind, rain, snow, hail, extreme heat, and biting insects. Both artificial and natural shelters should offer a dry, mud-free resting area, taking into account the needs and preferences of individual animals.

Seasonal changes in weather should be anticipated, with contingency plans in place for flooding, snow, and heatwaves. Natural shelter (e.g. hedges, woodland) may provide some protection and environmental enrichment but may not be adequate for prolonged periods of extreme weather. Donkeys are less well adapted to UK weather conditions and require a man-made shelter at all times of the year.



A group of horses using a shelter to seek shade. Image supplied and permission use granted by The Horse Trust.

Good practice:

- Donkeys should have access to adequate shelter and dry areas at all times.
- All equids should have access to a form of shelter at all times.
- Donkeys should have access to a man-made, three-sided shelter and areas of hardstanding at all times.
- Owners and keepers should provide shelters that have a dry, clean area where equids can lie down and rest/sleep within a 24-hour period.

- Owners and keepers should ensure that all natural shelters are free from toxic plants and trees.
- Owners and keepers should ensure that field shelters can accommodate all equids comfortably, with multiple large entry/exit points to reduce conflict.
- Owners and keepers should consider that trees and hedgerows used for shelter can also offer excellent enrichment and foraging opportunities, if safe. However, trees and hedgerows may not provide adequate shelter in certain weather conditions.
- Owners and keepers should provide shelters with suitable flooring (hard standing or well-drained surfaces) to ensure year-round mud-free access.
- Owners and keepers should consider that entrances ideally face away from prevailing winds.

Enhanced management measures:

- In winter months, owners and keepers should consider solar or battery-powered lighting for health checks where there is no mains electricity.

Social groupings

Equids are highly social animals that normally maintain close visual and physical contact with their group members, forming strong social bonds. Social contact opportunities refer to times when equids can interact with other equids via direct physical contact. It is important that all equids have social contact opportunities daily, particularly with those equids they have formed close social bonds with and consider friends and companions.

Social contact should include safe opportunities for direct physical contact, allowing for mutual grooming, resting, eating together and playing. Direct physical contact and positive interactions can be provided for via outdoor or indoor turnout areas with adequate space for freedom of movement and foraging. Thoughtful stable design should allow safe direct physical contact with compatible neighbours and include safe space to rest out of the reach of neighbours.

Introducing unfamiliar equids can cause considerable stress and may lead to injury if not undertaken carefully. When introducing new equids to each other or into established groups, it should be done gradually and over a period of time that allows individual animals to become familiar and comfortable with each other. Direct introductions should be undertaken in a calm and safe way, with owners and keepers able to monitor all equids to ensure any initial conflicts resolve over the following weeks and months.



Two horses in a grassy field grooming each other. Image supplied and permission use granted by The University of Edinburgh.

Good practice:

- Equids have a behavioural need for social contact with other equids and should be allowed to live in familiar and consistent social groups. If this is not possible, equids should be given social contact opportunities at least daily.
- Positive human interactions can supplement social contact but cannot replace interaction with other equids.
- Owners and keepers should integrate new equids into existing social groups carefully and in a phased manner to reduce stress and injuries.
- Equids should have clear visual contact with other equids when they are housed in individual stables or turned out individually. But this does not replace their need for physical contact for at least part of the day.
- Equids should not be forced into proximity with those they are incompatible with. Initial steps such as ensuring there is enough forage and space, may resolve initial challenges, but ultimately this may require moving equids into different stables or fields. However, it is abnormal for an equid to not get on with any other equid after a period of time and veterinary investigation should be undertaken as pain is a common underlying reason.
- Equids that form strong bonds should not be unnecessarily separated, as this can cause distress and health issues.
- Equids isolated for biosecurity/health reasons should have individualised plans to compensate for lack of social contact - consult with a veterinary surgeon or qualified behaviour professional. (See Appendix 1: Equid-centred quarantine and isolation plan).

- In rare circumstances, keeping an equid with other animals (e.g., cattle, sheep, goats) may be acceptable in the short-term if moving them would cause more stress, however mixed species groups must be compatible and any risks to either species mitigated. Groups of equids can usually live compatibly alongside other species, provided initial introductions are undertaken gradually.

Sleep and rest

Equids need access to an environment conducive to resting and sleep behaviours that support physical and mental recovery. An equid's environment should allow opportunities for rest and sleep. Sleep and rest are essential for the equid's ability to remain physically fit and recover from exertion, injury or illness, and although they can rest standing up, they need to be able to lie down to get appropriate deep sleep. Equids do not sleep for long periods at a time, but rest and sleep for short periods throughout the day and night for around 3-5 hours over a 24-hour period.



A group of horses in a grassy field with two lying down resting. Image supplied and permission use granted by T Coombs.

Good practice:

- Equids should have daily access to a dry and comfortable area that enables them to lie down.
- Equids should be allowed a period of uninterrupted rest overnight – which is often the time they lie down to have their deep sleep.
- Equids suffering from sleep deprivation collapse should be assessed by a veterinary surgeon.
- Equids should be provided with rest periods after exercise, transportation and stressful events. Length of rest should be appropriate to workload, climate, health and age of equid.

- Owners and keepers should be able to satisfy themselves daily that their equid shows signs of having been lying down to ensure they are getting sufficient rest - this might be via manual observations (presence of bedding in the mane/ mud on the body) or using CCTV equipment.
- Owners and keepers should monitor equid rest and sleep behaviours alongside any physical, social or environmental changes, recent travel events, or medical conditions.

Rugging

Most healthy equids do not require rugs during the winter months, provided they have access to shelter and are given sufficient forage to generate body heat. Where possible (particularly where appropriate shelter is provided) rugging should be avoided, as it restricts social behaviour, such as grooming, as well as the full effect of pleasant experiences, such as rolling and scratching.

Over-rugging can negatively affect equid welfare, including sleep quality. Rugs are most likely to be needed during prolonged wind and rain. Prolonged wet weather without adequate shelter may prevent natural drying of the coat, increasing the risk of skin conditions such as rain scald; in such cases, a lightweight waterproof rug is recommended.

Equids are naturally well adapted to changes in environmental temperature. Horses' thermoneutral zone ranges from approximately 5°C to 25°C, within which they can maintain a core temperature of around 37.5°C. There is a lack of data to provide evidence on the thermoneutral zone of donkeys although, as temperatures fall below 5°C or rise above 25°C, equids of any species may seek shelter or shade.

In the UK, equids typically start to develop a thicker winter coat in late summer and autumn. Clipped, elderly, or underweight equids may require a thin layer of insulation for additional warmth. Care must be taken not to over-rug equids prone to weight gain. As part of weight management, a partial clip may be used during winter, accompanied by a lightweight waterproof rug in wet conditions.

During the warmer months, some equids may suffer from fly irritation. Fly rugs and hoods may be used to offer protection but must be well-fitted and checked daily for rubbing. The negative impact of irritation by flies needs to be counterbalanced with restricting their ability to engage in mutual grooming when wearing a rug.



Two horses standing in front of a shelter, with one wearing a fly rug. Image supplied and permission for use granted by B Lancaster.

Most equids housed indoors do not require rugging, especially native breeds. However, certain individuals and those that are elderly, sick, or prone to weight loss may need rugs to help maintain body temperature. Adequate forage and opportunities for movement should be provided to support thermoregulation.

Good practice:

- Most equids will not require a rug if they are kept in an environment which optimises Friends, Forage and Freedom, alongside access to shelter.
- Owners and keepers should tailor rug use, if required, to individual equid needs, based on body condition, coat thickness, age, clip status, health and access to shelter.
- Owners and keepers should monitor equids for signs of cold, such as shivering or a tucked-up appearance, and of overheating such as being warm to touch under the rug or any evidence of moisture/sweat.
- When rugs are required, owners and keepers should ensure all rugs and hoods are properly fitted and fastened. All rugs should be removed daily to check for rubs, sores, or other health issues.
- Owners and keepers should provide donkeys with rugs specifically designed for their unique body shape (narrow shoulders, chest, and neck); pony rugs are not suitable and may cause injury.

- Owners and keepers should ensure rugs are regularly cleaned, maintained, and repaired to remain safe and effective. A spare rug should be available to allow wet rugs to dry thoroughly.
- Equids with high body condition scores should generally not be rugged in winter, to allow natural weight loss, but must have continuous access to shelter and forage.

Tethering

Tethering refers to the practice of securing an equid by a chain or tether attached to a neck strap or headcollar and anchored to a fixed point, thereby restricting the equid to a defined area in order to allow them to graze.

Tethering is not a suitable method of long-term management due to significant limitations it places on the equid's welfare. However, when done responsibly and for short-term, temporary purposes, tethering may be acceptable in exceptional circumstances such as rest stops during travel, while arranging proper housing or on veterinary advice for restricted feeding, provided high standards of supervision and care are maintained.

Good practice:

- Owners and keepers should ensure headcollars and/or neck straps do not cause injury or sores.
- Owners and keepers should ensure that, if continuous access to water cannot be maintained, water is offered at regular intervals throughout day.
- Equids should be appropriately trained to wearing a headcollar and neck strap for tethering to prevent panic or distress.
- Equids should be tethered using a well-fitted leather neck strap or head-collar, using swivel mechanism, connected to a minimum 6–7 metre (20 ft) chain.
- Equids should be secured using a chain that has a swivel mechanism at both ends, at the anchorage point and at the point of attachment to the animal, to prevent twisting and entanglement.
- Tethered equids should be checked at least three times daily to ensure they have not become entangled or injured and have access to food and water.
- Owners and keepers should ensure that tethering sites provide a natural windbreak (e.g. hedgerows, woodland, or buildings) but not be tethered near fencing or other structures where they could become trapped.
- Equids should be tethered within sight of other equids but positioned far enough apart to prevent tether entanglement.
- Owners and keepers should ensure that tethered equids are not placed on boggy or wet ground where they stand in mud for extended periods.

Emergency weather planning

Emergency weather plans should be in place in the likelihood of floods, heat waves, snow, wildfires and storms. (See Appendix 2 - Emergency Planning for Equids.)

Conservation and regenerative grazing

Equids are increasingly used in conservation grazing and regenerative land management. These free-living groups contribute to biodiversity and habitat restoration, and although their welfare needs do not differ from those of domestic equids, how they are managed is often quite different. They often graze over large, extensive areas where routine practices such as daily handling or regular dung removal are neither practical nor appropriate. Management should therefore prioritise low-stress, minimal-intervention approaches that respect their social structures, natural foraging behaviour, and adaptation to the environment. Owners and keepers responsible for these herds should ensure habitats provide adequate nutrition, rest areas, shelter and water, while maintaining socially stable groups and monitoring welfare primarily through observation rather than frequent handling.



A group of semi-feral ponies grazing on open land. Image supplied and permission use granted by World Horse Welfare.

Stabling and housing systems

Stabling and housing

With more owners and keepers choosing to allow their equid to live outside year-round, stabling is often no longer a requirement. However, access to built or enclosed spaces remains useful for medical, management or emergency purposes. Multipurpose spaces that allow equids to come and go freely but can be enclosed when needed should be considered, particularly where facilities are limited.



A group of donkeys in a large barn with no partitions, some lying on straw while others are standing. Image supplied and permission for use granted by The Donkey Sanctuary.

When equids are stabled or confined, their natural behavioural needs should continue to be prioritised. Resting and rolling behaviours are positive indicators of welfare. Bedding type and depth directly influence sleep quality, which impacts trainability and equid–human safety. Poor design or maintenance of stabling poses risks including respiratory disease, injury, fire, and disease transmission. Adequate light (natural and artificial) is essential. Ventilation, drainage, and hygiene must be prioritised.

Good practice:

- If stabling is required, owners and keepers should house equids within a safe, clean environment, that allows adequate space to move easily and lie down in a normal resting posture.
- Stabled equids should have daily access to free movement.
- Equids should be housed within buildings that are structurally sound and adequately ventilated, with no sharp edges or protrusions.
- If housed alongside other equids, there should also be sufficient space for subordinate equids to escape aggression.
- Owners and keepers should ensure that all fixtures (e.g. tie rings, drinkers) are safely placed and all lightning is enclosed with wiring secured out of reach of any equid.
- Equids should be housed on non-slip, well-drained flooring.
- Equids should be housed within sight of other equids and ideally be able to choose to touch, or mutually groom, a preferred companion.
- Equids should be provided with multiple forage types and food-based enrichment if stabled for longer durations.
- Equids should be housed within areas that are as large as possible and allow for both social contact opportunities as well as opportunities to be out of reach of other equids.
- Owners and keepers should ensure any housing has continuous airflow preferably above the body height of the equid. One window or top door should be open unless weather conditions dictate otherwise.
- Owners and keepers should ensure any glazing is safety-grade (e.g. Perspex®) and protected with grilles.
- Owners and keepers should ensure bedding is clean, non-toxic, low dust, and deep enough for comfort considering periods of standing and lying down. Bedding should absorb urine and be replaced regularly to keep the living environment clean.
- Care should be taken to select groups that are compatible. Ensure shared barns are large enough to allow all equids to move freely and lie down simultaneously and avoid competition over resources.



Two horses grooming each other over a partition. Image supplied and permission for use granted by The Horse Trust.

Box rest and restricted movement

Owners and keepers should have a contingency plan for equids requiring box rest or restricted movement. Where total box rest is not essential, creating stable-sized pens using electric fencing in an arena or paddock can allow limited movement.

Good practice:

Unless veterinary advice indicates otherwise (e.g. for biosecurity), isolated equids should:

- Be within sight and preferably touch of a companion and ideally have daily interactions with a compatible equid if safe.
- Be offered environmental enrichment (e.g. forage toys, multiple forage types, flavoured water, and hanging vegetables). These should be introduced carefully, with the equid monitored during the initial introductions.
- Be groomed or be able to self-groom and given low-stress training or physiotherapy exercises as advised by professionals.

Mare and foal housing

Good practice:

If mares and foals are housed indoors, owners and keepers should ensure that the space:

- Allows the mare to roll safely and care for the foal.
- Provides room for both mare and foal to lie down comfortably.
- Facilitates safe access to water and feed.
- Offers daily turnout, ideally with other mares with foals.

Fire safety

Good practice:

Fire is a critical hazard in equid accommodation. Owners and keepers should:

- Seek advice from the local Fire Prevention Officer.
- Ensure all installations (lighting, alarms, extinguishers) are inspected annually.
- Only use fire-safe electrical equipment installed by qualified professionals.
- Prohibit smoking and display appropriately clear, legible and visible signage.
- Store bedding, forage, and waste materials with adequate ventilation that is located a safe distance away from stabling to reduce the risk of fire spread.
- Maintain a clear and rehearsed emergency plan for rapid equid evacuation.

Link to relevant Scottish Government guidance: [Fire safety risk assessment: forms and guidance - gov.scot](#).

Environmental sustainability

Sustainable practices contribute to long-term benefits and environmental conservation. Owners and keepers should seek to integrate the following sustainable practices into management:

Good practice:

- Plant equid-friendly hedgerows or trees.
- Manage manure in a sustainable and environmentally responsible manner.
- Owners and keepers should dispose of waste using environmentally sound methods.

Enhanced management measures:

- Use the Equid Carbon Calculator to assess emissions: [Equine Carbon Calculator](#).
- Reduce fuel use and chemical inputs in land management.
- Collect rainwater (not for drinking use).

Handling, training and behaviour

Safe and ethical handling and training practices

Equid welfare and human safety improve when handlers and trainers understand behavioural indicators of stress and adjust their handling and training methods accordingly to avoid causing fear, distress or confusion. Human interaction should be a predominantly positive experience, avoiding unnecessary stress through kind, calm and empathetic handling and training methods based on an understanding of equid behaviour and learning theory.



A horse being led across a grassy field by their handler, who is wearing a hard hat and gloves. Image supplied and permission for use granted by World Horse Welfare.

Good practice:

- Methods used to handle and restrain equids should not cause injury or suffering.
- Equids should always be handled in a kind, calm and empathetic manner.
- Equids should not be handled roughly or in a way that causes fear.
- Equids should not be trained using methods that cause avoidable distress, fear or pain.
- Owners, keepers and trainers should be familiar with equid behaviour and how they learn.

- Equids should only undergo handling and training that matches their physical and mental maturity.
- Owners, keepers and trainers should recognise and reduce signs of physical and mental discomfort, with professional help sought when necessary.

Tack and equipment

When using tack and equipment, it should be fitted and used in a way that is minimally aversive and does not create any lasting pain or suffering.

Good practice:

- Any tack or equipment placed on an equid should be correctly fitted and be well maintained.
- Owners, keepers and trainers should understand how to use any tack and equipment appropriately.
- Equids should only have saddles used on them that have been correctly fitted by a professional saddle fitter.
- Saddles should be refitted on an annual basis, ideally more regularly.
- Tack and equipment should not be used to hide training deficits or use excessive force to control an equid, except in emergency situations.

Rider and driver weight and size

It is important that equids are not asked to carry riders or pull carriages/traps that are too heavy or physically big for them, as this could increase the likelihood of injury in both the short and long term.

Good practice:

- Owners and keepers should not let anyone ride their equid if the person's weight exceeds that specified for welfare or safety reasons by a relevant riding school, sport body or other organisation. In the absence of such specification, equids should not generally be ridden by a person who exceeds 17% of the weight of the equid.
- Owners and keepers should also consider their physical height in proportion to their equid to ensure welfare is not compromised.
- Owners and keepers should ensure that any driven equid is not asked to pull a weight that is beyond their ability to do so comfortably.

Grooming and daily checks

Importance of daily checks

Daily checks are a vital part of good equid care, helping to prevent welfare issues and can provide positive opportunities for owners and keepers to bond with their equid.

Good practice:

- Owners and keepers should check their equids at least twice a day - ideally morning and evening – to reduce the likelihood of an injury or illness being left untreated for long periods of time.
- Owners and keepers should observe behaviour and movement carefully to detect any subtle changes.

Trimming or removal of hair

An equid's hair plays an important role in not only maintaining physical health, but also in behaviour and communications. It may be beneficial for some body hair to be removed at certain times of the year to prevent overheating or to aid weight loss. However there are certain areas of hair, particularly the tail, that should not be removed as this is detrimental to welfare. Clipping and pulling is likely to be stressful for equids, even for those who are accustomed and appear to tolerate it.

An equid's tail is extremely important and useful in terms of communication and maintaining health. Equids use the tail to remove flies from around their bodies, as well as in communication with other equids and handlers. Similarly, they use their whiskers, especially those around the muzzle and eyes as important sensory tools to detect their environment.

Good practice:

- Equids should not have their tail hair shaved or have the majority of it removed unless there is a clear veterinary or welfare reason.
- Equids should not have their sensory whiskers (muzzle or eyelid vibrissae) trimmed or removed as this can compromise their ability to navigate the environment and may cause stress or injury.
- Owners and keepers should shorten manes and tidy tails using techniques that do not hurt or cause distress (mane and tailing pulling should be avoided).
- Clipping by owners and keepers for medical, comfort or management reasons should be done with care and consideration for the equid's needs.

Care of the retired equid

End of career responsibility recognises that owners, breeders, trainers and the wider equid industry have an ethical duty to safeguard an equid's welfare beyond its

competitive or working life. This includes planning and funding appropriate retirement, rehoming or, where necessary, humane end of life decisions, ensuring the equid is not exposed to neglect, unnecessary suffering or abandonment once it can no longer be ridden or worked. Responsible end of career management reflects a lifelong commitment to the equid – from birth to death.

Responsible Breeding

Breeding equids is a significant responsibility that impacts equid welfare across generations. Ethical and responsible breeding practices can ensure equids are born with good health, sound conformation and suitable temperaments, reducing the likelihood of welfare issues. Selecting breeding pairs based on healthy physical traits and longevity increases the likelihood that offspring remain fit over a lifetime.

Avoiding breeding from sires and dams with behavioural or temperamental issues, or genetic conditions such as joint problems, respiratory issues and metabolic disorders will avoid such issues and conditions being passed on to the offspring. Poor breeding decisions can lead to overpopulation, health problems, and unwanted equids.



A mare and foal in a grassy field. Image supplied and permission use granted by World Horse Welfare.

Stallions have the same social needs as mares and geldings, with social isolation leading to stress, anxiety, and behavioural issues. By allowing stallions to interact

with other equids, breeders can promote emotional well-being and ensure a healthy productive process.

Good practice:

- Owners and keepers should be aware of how their breeding practices may be contributing to equid overpopulation and neglect.
- Owners and keepers should ensure breeding decisions prioritise equid health and welfare over financial or aesthetic motives that may compromise the equids' functional capabilities and well-being.
- Owners and keepers should provide optimal care for the equid and offspring throughout the breeding process, minimising stress and physical strain.
- Equids with severe issues should not be bred from, including equids with:
 - heritable diseases or disorders,
 - poor conformation that will lead to poor welfare, or
 - behavioural or temperament issues that aren't pain related or improve with suitable management changes.
- Owners and keepers should focus breeding practices on long-term health to ensure that mare, stallion and offspring are physically capable of engaging in natural behaviours and adapting to their environment.
- Owners and keepers should base breeding decisions on careful selection criteria including good health and condition, age, pregnancy history, soundness, good reproductive anatomy, elimination of heritable disease and disorders and future demand for the resulting foal.
- Equids should only be bred from if there is a viable plan for the foal's future and good prospects that the foal will be well cared for, including considerations if current circumstances change.
- Owners and keepers should have the necessary experience, facilities, welfare knowledge and financial resources to care for any mares, stallions, and foals in their care.
- Owners and keepers should maintain open and transparent communication regarding the health histories of breeding equids, disclosing known health issues and genetic predispositions to facilitate informed decision-making.
- Owners and keepers should consider advice from a veterinary surgeon regarding pre-breeding checks.
- Owners and keepers should consider the long-term retirement plan of breeding equids following their reproductive years, ensuring a long-term life of dignity and comfort.

Foaling

It is important to provide low stress surroundings for both mare and foal throughout the foaling process and early stages of development, from the perinatal period through to weaning. Newborn foals need to ingest adequate amounts of colostrum as soon as possible after birth, preferably nursing within the first 3 hours of birth.



A jenny with her foal in a grassy field, both are grazing. Image supplied and permission for use granted by The Donkey Sanctuary.

Good practice:

- Mares having prolonged difficulty foaling should receive veterinary attention in a timely manner.
- Foals must be microchipped by the end of the year of their birth or within six months of birth, whichever is later, in accordance with the Equine Animal (Identification) (Scotland) Regulations 2019 for all Equidae to be accompanied by a passport.
- Owners and keepers should have a foaling plan in place made in conjunction with their veterinary surgeon.
- Mares should receive appropriate prenatal and postnatal care, including appropriate nutrition and veterinary oversight.
- Owners and keepers should be educated on foaling and foaling complications.
- Owners and keepers should continue to monitor the mare to be sure that the placenta has been passed within 3 hours from birth, and check to ensure it is complete. Failure to pass a complete placenta would require veterinary assistance.
- Foaling environments should be safe, clean, and well-monitored.
- Mares in late pregnancy should be checked at least twice daily for signs of impending foaling and more frequently as foaling time approaches. They should not be disturbed or interfered with unnecessarily. CCTV may be utilised to prevent disturbances and to increase frequency of checks, though should not replace in-person checks.

- Owners and keepers should ensure pregnant mares and jennets are appropriately vaccinated during gestation to protect themselves as well as protect the foal after foaling through immunity transferred to the foal via colostrum. Vaccinations should be boosted three to four weeks before the projected foaling date to ensure optimal antibody concentration in the colostrum.
- Owners or keepers should ensure foals are immunised with primary and booster vaccines as this affects their vaccine response later in life.
- Mares about to give birth should be provided with a clean, hazard free area. This could be a well-bedded foaling box of a large size, or a paddock area that includes a sheltered foaling area in the event of adverse weather conditions. The mare should be allowed to become familiar with the foaling area several days before foaling.
- Unless medically required, foals should be allowed to start suckling naturally with unrestricted access to their mother.
- Owners and keepers should be prepared for having to care for an orphaned foal and have access to appropriate resources, including milk replacers and socialisation strategies.
- Owners and keepers should be prepared to provide support for mares who have lost their foals.

Weaning

Weaning can significantly impact an equid's quality of life at physical, behavioural and emotional levels. Foals that experience inadequate early care or abrupt weaning may develop behavioural issues or struggle with adapting to new situations. Similarly, abrupt weaning will be stressful for the mare. However with careful planning and a gradual approach this process can be undertaken with minimal negative impacts on both mare and foal.

Successful care and management during these critical development stages will equip the foal with a robust musculoskeletal system, healthy selective grazing behaviours, good social skills and safe behaviours around human handlers while promoting a good quality of life for the young equid. Foals benefit from being gradually weaned into a mixed age group of youngsters to play with along with a familiar adult equid to learn from. Thoughtful handling and management from birth can improve their resilience later in life.

Development of stereotypies such as cribbing often start around the time of weaning. Such behaviours reflect poor welfare practices (that induce stress and nutrition too high in starch) and so if they occur the management of that individual/group should be reassessed to ensure their species-specific (Friends, Forage and Freedom) and individual needs are being met.

Good practice:

- Weaning of foals should happen gradually from around 9-10 months of age unless under veterinary advice.
- Weaning should be undertaken gradually, ideally with both familiar adult equids and youngsters in a group setting, to limit stress to mare and foal and encourage natural behaviours.
- Foals should not be weaned by being isolated.
- Foals should gradually move to a forage-based diet and supplementary feeding that include cereals should be avoided.
- The mare's welfare should also be closely monitored throughout the weaning process, ensuring she does not become overly stressed.

Enhanced management measures:

- Start the process of weaning from 10 plus months of age to be more in line with the weaning age of free ranging, naturally living equids and therefore be more species appropriate to the equids' natural needs.

Health and veterinary care

Ensuring good equid welfare requires a strong partnership between owners and keepers, and veterinary professionals including veterinary nurses. Regular veterinary care helps prevent disease, manages injuries and maintains overall health. Owners who actively engage with their veterinary practice gain valuable knowledge, improve their ability to recognise early signs of illness, identify priorities and ensure timely intervention when necessary. By fostering a proactive approach to veterinary care, owners contribute to their equid's long-term well-being and quality of life.

Recognising pain in equids is essential for ensuring their health, welfare, and quality of life. Equids are prey animals and often mask signs of discomfort, making pain identification challenging. Effective pain recognition enables timely intervention, preventing minor issues from escalating into serious welfare concerns. Understanding behavioural and physiological indicators of pain allows owners and keepers to make informed decisions regarding equid care, management practices, and overall equid well-being.



A veterinary surgeon examining a horse, who is standing still and being held by their handler. Image supplied and permission for use granted by World Horse Welfare.

Emergency and urgent care

As highly social prey animals, equids are adapted to conceal illness, injury and pain for fear of falling victim to predators. It is important for owners and keepers to be aware of this and learn to recognise the daily behaviours and movement patterns of equids in their care.

While not exhaustive, common signs of behaviour that may require urgent care include:

- signs of colic – may come on slowly or be subtle in the early stages:
 - change in behaviour (more lethargic; increased anxiety; being withdrawn or depressed),
 - reduced food intake,
 - change in water intake,
 - change in manure consistency,
- signs of pain or discomfort,
- large wounds or wounds close to joints,
- reluctance to move,
- fast breathing,
- unexplained sweating,
- lameness,
- swelling,

- discharge from the eyes, ears or nose,
- persistent coughing or difficulty breathing,
- fever,
- for donkeys and mules, owners and keepers should be aware they have subtle behaviours, and are less likely to show illness, with reduced or loss of appetite being a significant concern.

Good practice:

- Equids that are sick, injured and/or in pain should be assessed and receive prompt appropriate treatment which may include euthanasia. If in doubt, a veterinary surgeon must be consulted in a timely manner.
- Owners and keepers should know what is normal for their equid in terms of behaviour and movement patterns, and be able to identify abnormal behaviours, signs of sickness or injury.
- Equids suffering chronic pain should receive appropriate treatment and be managed in a way that promotes a good quality of life.
- Sick, injured or recovering equids should be monitored at least twice daily (using CCTV where appropriate).
- Owners and keepers should check equids carefully and regularly to identify problems that may not be apparent at a distance.
- Owners and keepers should learn to take equids' temperature, pulse and respiration rates. When vital signs are abnormal or unexpected, a veterinary surgeon should be consulted.
- Owners and keepers should have basic knowledge of equid first aid.
- An up-to-date first-aid kit should be readily available on all equid premises, along with a transport plan to a veterinary hospital if required. All keepers should be aware of its location and implementation.
- Equids should not be given pain relief and long-term drug use to mask suffering in order to continue ridden or working activity. Medication should support quality of life, not extend function at the expense of comfort.
- Equid owners and keepers should be regularly assessing equids for subtle changes in posture, facial expressions, appetite and movement.
- An emergency plan should be in place for every equid including plans for euthanasia, financial limits, treatment preferences and thresholds to treatments.
- Equids should be registered with a veterinary practice which can provide equine routine and emergency care, and build a strong, ongoing relationship with their team.
- Owners and keepers should ensure the practice has up-to-date medical records and history of the equid.
- Veterinary contact information, including out-of-hours contact, should be readily available on all equid premises.
- Owners and keeper should assign a named person to act on their behalf and have responsibility for equid health management if they are uncontactable.

- Owners and keepers should ensure that their equid's passports are easily accessible to ensure treatments can be made available.

Routine and preventative health care

Routine health maintenance promotes good welfare, and helps to prevent suffering, injury and disease.

Hoof care

Hoof care is a critical aspect of equid health and welfare. The hooves of equids are dynamic structures that continually grow and adapt to environmental conditions, diet, terrain, and movement. Proactive hoof care is essential to identify and address underlying issues promptly, thereby preventing more severe complications. Neglecting hoof maintenance can lead to pain, discomfort, impaired mobility, and behavioural changes.



A farrier trimming the hoof of a horse. Image supplied and permission for use granted by World Horse Welfare.

Regular examinations by farriers or appropriately qualified professionals are imperative to maintain optimal hoof-health and overall well-being.

Good practice:

- Whether shod or unshod, hooves should not be allowed to grow to excessive lengths causing injury or discomfort.
- Equids should receive veterinary or farrier attention if they are exhibiting signs of pain, difficulty moving or reluctance to weight-bear. Any advice or treatment plans should be adhered to.
- Owners and keepers should be able to recognise signs of good and poor hoof health, including discomfort or pain manifesting as lameness or behavioural changes, and seek assistance promptly.
- Equids should have their hooves checked and trimmed at regular intervals to prevent overgrowth and associated discomfort.
- Owners and keepers should only use registered farriers or appropriately qualified and insured individuals to perform hoof care procedures.
- Equids should be provided with access to dry ground to prevent excessive moisture accumulation. Donkey hooves are more prone to disease when exposed to wet conditions, emphasising the importance of donkeys having access to hard standing.
- Equids should have their hooves cleaned and inspected regularly for signs of disease, injuries, abnormal growth, shape distortions, or excessive wear. This practice aids in the early detection of conditions like thrush, cracks, or foreign bodies. Owners and keepers should also regularly observe equids for signs of hoof discomfort, including reluctance to walk, turn, traverse hard ground, shortened stride, weight shifting, abnormal heat or pulses, and reluctance to lift feet.
- Equids with persistent hoof issues should be evaluated for metabolic diseases such as Equine Metabolic Syndrome (EMS) or Pituitary Pars Intermedia Dysfunction (PPID) and their diet and grazing habits adjusted accordingly.
- Equids with chronic hoof conditions, such as those resulting from laminitis or injuries, require closer monitoring and more frequent hoof care to manage distorted growth patterns effectively.
- Equids should stop any work at the onset of hoof discomfort to prevent further damage. Ensure the environment and diet are conducive to recovery, especially in cases of chronic conditions like laminitis.
- Equids should have their hooves maintained appropriately to the individual's conformation through regular trimming or shoeing, typically every 6–8 weeks, or more frequently during periods of rapid growth or for specific health conditions.
- Equids should be prepared for hoof care procedures. This includes familiarising them to handling and ensuring practitioners are aware of any specific needs, such as accommodating arthritis or previous bad experiences.

Enhanced management measures:

- Owners and keepers, with professional guidance, should become familiar with what constitutes a healthy and balanced hoof for each limb and recognise deviations that may require intervention.

Dental care

A preventative dental care strategy combining annual examinations and early intervention should be in place to identify and treat issues before they become advanced. Consideration should be given to the impact of selective breeding and dietary practices that may predispose certain individuals or groups to developmental or acquired dental disorders.



A horse has its mouth held open, while it is examined by a professional. Image supplied and permission for use granted by The Horse Trust.

Good practice:

- Any equid exhibiting signs of mouth pain (such as quidding, headshaking or other behaviours) should be seen by a veterinary surgeon or an equid dental technician in a timely manner.
- Equids should have their teeth examined by a qualified equid dental technician or veterinary surgeon using a full-mouth speculum and appropriate lighting at least annually to identify and prevent painful conditions.
- Owners and keepers should only use suitably qualified professionals (e.g. veterinary surgeons or qualified dental technicians) to undertake dental procedures on their equid(s).
- Equids with existing dental disorders, older animals, or those on restricted grazing should be examined by a qualified equid dental technician or veterinary surgeon at least every six months or as advised.

Vaccination

Vaccinations form part of general health management plans to reduce the risk of introduction or spread of infectious diseases. Vaccinations offer equids protection from certain diseases, although do not completely eliminate the risk of disease outbreak. Maintaining good biosecurity to control infection is important, even for equids that have been vaccinated.

Good practice:

- Owners and keepers should protect the welfare of their equid by vaccinating against tetanus, and ideally equid influenza and strangles as a minimum. Other use of vaccines (equid herpesvirus, West Nile virus and equine viral arteritis) should be discussed with your veterinary surgeon.
- Owners and keepers should undertake a risk-based assessment to determine whether other vaccinations would be beneficial.
- Owners and keepers should keep an up-to-date record of vaccinations administered identifying the equid(s) vaccinated, date and any adverse reactions in their equid's passport.
- Owners or keepers should know the vaccination status of new arrivals to yards and ensure they are properly vaccinated. Quarantine is recommended for new arrivals from an unknown or high risk health status, with temperature and diagnostic tests taken to rule out infection.
- Equids should be rested from ridden or other work for 24-48 hours or as advised by the veterinary surgeon following vaccination, to reduce the risk of an adverse reaction developing.

Parasite control

A holistic approach to parasite control is important for equid comfort and health. The risk for every equid is used to inform management, testing and treatment approaches. A free online calculator is available to assess worm risk of the equid(s) at: www.whatsyourwormrisk.com.

Due to an increasing build-up of dewormer (anthelmintic) resistance, testing should be carried out to inform the need to treat individuals. Faecal and antibody-based tests can considerably reduce the number of worming treatments required, protecting the effectiveness of wormers. They are necessary for enabling a risk-based assessment to be undertaken and for a targeted deworming program to be developed. Advice should be sought from a veterinary surgeon, with saliva and blood antibody tests available to diagnose tapeworm and small red worm infections in horses (please note – these are not validated in donkeys or hybrids).

In all cases, based on the results of testing, a suitably qualified person (SQP) or a veterinary surgeon can advise a targeted worming approach using, where relevant, the appropriate worming combination to reduce parasite burden, lower the risk of resistance development and minimise negative environmental impacts.

There are a limited number of products approved for the treatment of ectoparasites in equids. Under the advice of a veterinary surgeon, lice and mites may be controlled using approved topical and oral products. Flies, mosquitoes, and ticks currently have no treatments that are fully effective. Regular sanitation, avoiding exposure and use of physical protective screens or masks are recommended. If using any product, it is important to check all ingredients to ensure the application is safe for equids and humans and to understand any environmental impact and how to minimize it.

Good practice:

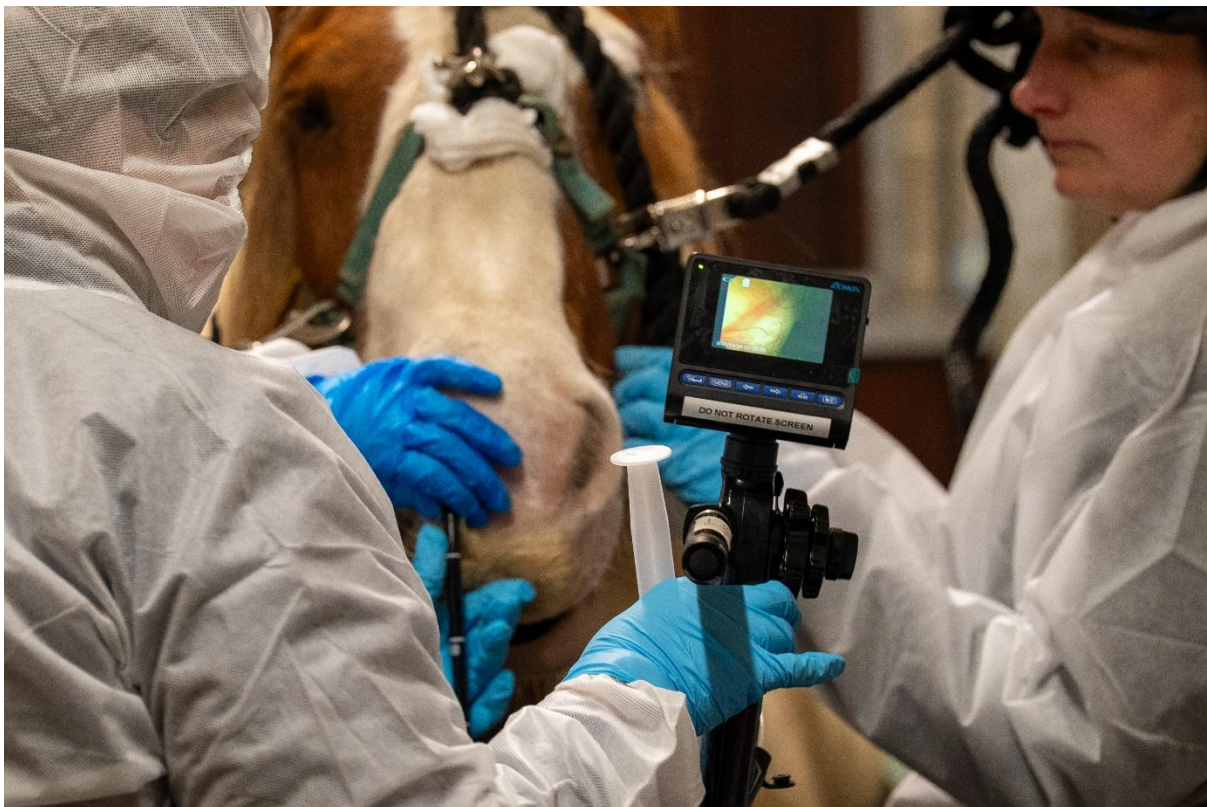
- Owners and keepers should have a parasite control programme in place to reduce parasite-related diseases. A veterinary surgeon can advise on an optimal programme for internal and external parasites, considering equid age, stocking density, drug resistance, drug availability, season, geography, and pasture management.
- A faecal W=worm egg count test should be undertaken 2-3 times a year when equids are grazing – with a reduction test incorporated into the parasite control plan to help monitor the effectiveness of the de-wormers used.
- For tapeworm control, a saliva or blood antibody test should be used once a year in spring or autumn for equids at low infection risk and twice a year in spring and autumn for equids at high risk. These are currently not validated for use in donkeys or hybrids.
- When grazed in groups, equids should be tested and, when necessary and as directed by test results, treated at the same time with the same anthelmintic compound.
- For equids that are susceptible to sweet itch (*Culicoides* hypersensitivity), midge exposure and areas of high insect activity should be avoided - including turnout immediately before and during midge season; turnout at dawn and dusk; turnout in pastures with ponds or standing water. Appropriate rugs can be beneficial in some cases allowing for longer periods of turnout.
- Owners and keepers should regularly inspect equids for signs of mites (particularly for equids with feathering to the limbs) and lice, and seek veterinary guidance on how best to treat and manage if suspected.
- Owners and keepers should keep up to date detailed records of all parasite treatments including identity of equid(s) treated, date, treatment, dosage and any adverse reactions.

Enhanced management measures:

- For small redworm control, equids at low risk of infection can be tested using an antibody-based small redworm blood test in autumn or winter to assess the need for treatment. This is not validated for use in donkeys or hybrids. Alternatively, in discussion with your SQP or veterinary surgeon, a risk-based decision can be made on whether to treat for encysted small redworm.

Infectious disease control and biosecurity

Infectious diseases are illnesses that are transmissible to equids from other equids or other species, directly, via the environment or using vectors such as flies and midges. Many diseases can be transmitted to other equids or species, including humans (zoonoses). Common equid infectious diseases are mostly caused by viruses and bacteria. Fungi, insects (such as lice and mites), and other parasites may be considered infectious, depending on how they are transmitted. The most common and significant infectious diseases that pose a threat to equids are tetanus, equid Influenza (EI or Equid Flu) strangles, herpes viruses, intestinal worms, lice and mites.



A horse being assessed by a veterinary surgeon, who is wearing disposable coveralls for biosecurity. Image supplied and permission to use granted by World Horse Welfare.

Biosecurity is the combination of efforts to protect equids from infectious disease and includes:

- good hygiene,
- preventing or reducing contact with high-risk equids and environments,
- vaccination,
- screening,
- quarantine and isolation.

Good practice:

Owners, keepers, veterinary surgeons and anyone in contact with an equid suspected of having a notifiable disease should report it in line with the following guidance: [Notifiable Equine Diseases: biosecurity information for equine keepers - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot).

End of life - euthanasia

Facing the end of an equid's life is one of the most emotionally and ethically challenging responsibilities for any owner and keeper. It carries deep physical, emotional and practical implications - not just for the equid, but also for the rest of their social group and their owners and keepers. End of life decision-making is a vital part of safeguarding welfare and needs to be considered for any age of equid.



Two horses looking into the camera. Image supplied and permission for use granted by World Horse Welfare.

As equids age, cumulative health challenges such as chronic pain, dental decline, musculoskeletal degeneration, cognitive decline and reduced mobility, can gradually erode their quality of life. However, equids of any age may develop health conditions that compromise their quality of life or exhibit repeated and extreme behaviours that endanger others that make euthanasia a necessary consideration.

Recognising when an equid is approaching end of life, and acting in a timely, informed manner is fundamental to preventing unnecessary suffering.

Good practice:

- Equid euthanasia must be humane.
- Only competent persons (e.g. veterinary surgeons, fallen stock collector/knacker or game keeper/marksperson) should carry out euthanasia.
- Owners and keepers should make the decision to euthanise in a timely manner and not unduly delay the decision.
- Owners and keepers should anticipate age-related health changes and be prepared to make a decision to euthanise in advance of any suffering.
- Owners and keepers should seek expert input from veterinary surgeons, qualified behavioural professionals and equid welfare professionals, using guidance from reputable charities and quality-of-life frameworks.
- Equids should be euthanised humanely in a familiar setting. If possible, choose a location the equid knows and trusts, with familiar people and group mates nearby.
- Owners and keepers should allow surviving equids time and space to adjust to the change of their social grouping following the death of a familiar equid.

Enhanced management measures:

- Where safe to do so, companions of the deceased individual should be given access to the body, even for a short period of time.

Bodies must be handled according to law, especially if the equid dies on private property or from a notifiable disease. The appropriate authorities and passport-issuing organisations must be informed promptly, and the equid's passport must be returned to the passport-issuing organisation within 30 days of death.

Transport

Transportation is a stressful activity for most equids. It is important that time and care is taken to appropriately train an equid to loading and travel to limit stress and reduce the risk of injury or disease. All equids must be fit to be transported, and every effort must be undertaken to ensure they remain fit throughout the journey. Various external factors will have an impact on how an individual copes with and recovers from a journey.

Commercial transportation of equids is subject to the legal requirements set out in Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 of 22 December 2004 (the "Regulations"). Article 3 of the Regulations requires that animals are transported in a way that is not likely to cause injury or undue suffering to them, along with the following general conditions:

- (a) arrangements are made to minimise the length of the journey and meet the animal's needs during it,
- (b) the animal is fit for the journey,
- (c) the method of transport has been chosen so as to avoid injury and suffering and ensure the animal's safety,

- (d) loading and unloading facilities avoid injury and suffering and ensure the animal's safety,
- (e) the persons handling the animal is trained or competent to do so,
- (f) the transport is carried out without delay and the animal's welfare condition is regularly checked and maintained,
- (g) the animal has sufficient floor area and height, and
- (h) water, feed and rest are offered to the animal at suitable intervals and are appropriate in quality.

Annex 1 of the Regulations contain the technical rules applicable to the transportation of animals.

The Scottish Government has produced guidance on commercial animal transport:
[Main requirements - Commercial animal transport: guidance - gov.scot.](#)



A large transporter parked and with rear door open. Image supplied and permission for use granted by The Donkey Sanctuary.

The transportation of equids should always prioritise safety, welfare and be compliant with legal requirements. Journeys should aim to be as safe and as calm as possible, with careful attention to preparation, the fitness and safety of the equid and vehicle standards.

Good practice:

- Equids should not be transported unless they are fit for the intended journey - unless travelling to a veterinary hospital for treatment.
- Equids should only be transported in conditions that prevent injury and unnecessary suffering.
- An equid should not be transported if:
 - they are unable to move independently without pain or walk unassisted,
 - they have a severe, open wound or prolapse,

- they are a pregnant female that has completed 90% or more of the expected gestation or has given birth in the previous week (does not apply to registered equids travelling under specific welfare conditions with a dedicated attendant),
- they are a newborn whose navel has not completely healed (does not apply to registered equids travelling under specific welfare conditions with a dedicated attendant).
- Owners, keepers and drivers should aim to keep journeys as short as possible.
- Vehicles should be designed, maintained, and operated to ensure equid welfare is not compromised.
- Equids should have adequate floor space and height with a compartment height at least 75cm higher than the tallest animal's withers.
- If transported on multi-deck vehicles, equids should be on the lowest deck.
- Equids older than 8 months should wear halters during transport unless they are unhandled.
- When transported on roll-on/roll-off vessels, equids should be in individual stalls, except for mares with foals who may share a stall with each other.
- Unhandled equids should not travel for longer than 8 hours and no more than four equids should be transported in a single compartment together.
- Equids must be accompanied by their passport or, in certain circumstances, their ScotEquine card.

Transport authorisations and certificates

- Anyone transporting animals in connection with an economic activity must be authorised by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA).
 - Type 1 Authorisation and Certificate of Competence are required for journeys over 65 km and up to 8 hours.
 - Type 2 Authorisation and corresponding certificates are needed for journeys over 8 hours.
- Vehicles used for journeys over 12 hours (within Great Britain) or over 8 hours (international) must have a Certificate of Vehicle Approval.
- Exemptions apply where transport is non-commercial or for direct veterinary care, but the requirements of the 2006 Act still apply.

Vehicle selection and safety

Good practice:

- Vehicles must be roadworthy, appropriately serviced and have an MOT certificate according to their weight class.
- Vehicles must be designed to carry equids, be capable of transporting the specific equids to be transported and have adequate ventilation/airflow.
- Vehicles must not exceed their maximum payload.

- Drivers should know the vehicle's payload - visit a local weighbridge if unsure. Plan for the combined weight of equid, tack, equipment, passengers, and pets.
- Owners and keepers should inspect the vehicle before loading.
- During hot weather, only vehicles capable of maintaining appropriate internal climatic conditions should be used.

Link to relevant guidance: [Extreme hot weather guidance for transporters and organisers of live animal transport by road.pdf](#).



A horse being loaded onto a trailer. Image supplied and permission for use granted by The Horse Trust.

Using commercial transporters

Good practice:

- Owners and keepers should check the transporter's experience, insurance (including level of cover) and accreditations – ensure all equids being transported are also insured in case of accident or injury.
- Owners and keepers should ask questions and check the transporter's compliance with legal requirements, including certificates of competence for journey durations.

Link to relevant guidance: [Main requirements - Commercial animal transport: guidance - gov.scot](#).

Journey planning

Good practice:

- Drivers should ensure horseboxes/trailers and towing vehicles are taxed, insured, and covered for breakdown that includes the transport of live animals.
- Drivers should have contingency plans in case of breakdown or incident on route – including the location of veterinary hospitals for emergencies.
- Drivers should ensure the vehicle has sufficient water and forage on board to allow equids to be fed and watered during rest stops.
- Drivers should check the weather forecasts relevant to the entire route and, during warm weather, plan to travel during cooler periods of the day.
- Equids should not travel in hot weather unless the vehicle can maintain a comfortable temperature within the equid compartment of a vehicle – this cannot be achieved without a forced ventilation system.
- Drivers should plan routes, being aware of weight limits, low bridges and likely high traffic/congestion areas, and identify safe stopping/rest points on the journey. Identify alternative routes that could be used if necessary.
- Drivers should have access to a charged mobile phone and inform someone of their journey plans and estimated time of arrival.

Preparing for transport

Good practice:

- Equids should have access to adequate forage and to an unrestricted and constant supply of clean drinking water for at least 6 hours before the start of the journey.
- Owners and keepers should assess fitness to travel and only load and transport equids that are fit to do so. Fitness to travel includes:
 - Physical health including hydration, weight and any injuries.
 - Mental and emotional state: stress, previous transport experiences and loading behaviour.

Enhanced management measures:

- Many equids travel better in company so consider whether this is an option for a less experienced equid or, if an equid must travel alone, ensure that the equid has been suitably prepared for this well in advance through gradual exposure to the vehicle and loading training.

Loading

Good practice:

- Equids should be trained to calmly load and stand on the vehicle.
- Owners and keepers should allow plenty of time for an equid to load and settle on the vehicle.

- Equids should not be forced and/or frightened in an attempt to load them on to a vehicle.
- Ensure the loading area is safe and free from hazards.

During the journey

Good practice:

- Drivers should keep journeys as short as possible - not exceeding 12 hours on a single journey.
- Ideally, drivers should use a camera to monitor equids throughout the journey.
- Equids should be given as much space as possible – aim for a minimum of 20 cm of additional space between the equid and the side of the vehicle on each side, and 30 cm of space between the equid and the breast bar.
- Equids should be tied in a way that allows them to lower their head during transportation.
- Equids should be provided with short mid-journey rests every four hours, providing access to water and forage whilst on the vehicle, for at least 45 mins during these mid-journey rest stops.
- Drivers should be competent and understand the impact that their driving style will have on the animals being transported. Drivers should aim to provide a smooth and comfortable experience for the equids, avoiding harsh breaking or acceleration.

After the journey

Good practice:

- Equids should be provided with unrestricted access to water and forage on arrival.
- Equids should be turned out into a safe area to allow them space to move freely and rest.

Buying and selling

Pre-purchase

Before purchasing an equid, potential owners should carefully consider the responsibilities and costs associated with equid care, including:

- Purchase cost
- Annual maintenance costs, including:
 - livery costs,
 - field and fencing maintenance,
 - feeding and forage,
 - farriery,

- dental care,
- test led de-worming programme and vaccinations,
- veterinary care,
- emergency veterinary treatment,
- insurance,
- essential equipment appropriate to the breed and environment (e.g. rugs).
- Succession plan or end of life considerations.

Time commitment and the owner's existing knowledge and experience of equid care should also be assessed.

Pre-purchase veterinary examinations are strongly advised and may be necessary for some insurance companies. Owners should consult their veterinary surgeon to determine whether a full five-stage veterinary examination is necessary or if a two-stage examination is sufficient. It is advisable to use your own or an independent veterinary surgeon.

Each equid is an individual, and factors such as breed, temperament, intended use, and suitable methods and locations for keeping it should be thoroughly thought through to ensure a suitable match.

Selecting an appropriate equid can help prevent behavioural and welfare problems in the future. While no process guarantees success, the following actions can improve outcomes:

- Visit, meet and assess several different equids before purchasing.
- Seek advice from an experienced person.
- Assess the equid's general behaviour, experience with handling and any other requirements.
- If the equid is intended to be ridden then ride in all intended activities (e.g. hacking, jumping, flatwork).
- Arrange at least two trials of the equid before committing.

Owners and keepers should also make contingency plans, such as:

- Provision for emergency stabling and transport.
- Access to isolation facilities if the animal becomes ill.
- Alternative care arrangements in the event the owner or carer becomes incapacitated.

Selling and rehoming

When selling an equid, the welfare of the animal should remain the top priority.

- Owners should be open and honest, carefully assess potential buyers, and ensure the equid is placed in a suitable new home.

- Owners should consider whether rehoming is in the equid's best interests, particularly for veteran equids or those with ongoing health issues. Alternatives such as a long-term loan or euthanasia may be more appropriate in some circumstances.
- Owners should create adverts that accurately reflect the equid's age, breed, experience, medical history, behavioural traits, and intended purpose. Use reputable equid-focussed websites and follow platform-specific rules regarding animal sales.
- Refer to guidance from the Pet Advertising Advisory Group for legal obligations relating to microchipping and passports. [Guidance on selling a pet](#).
- Owners should thoroughly investigate prospective buyers before arranging a viewing. Telephone conversations are preferable to text or email for assessing experience and suitability. Ask for riding/handling videos, references from instructors or yard managers, and verify information where possible.
- At viewings owners should:
 - Have the equid's passport and relevant documents available.
 - Passport and relevant documents should be provided to owner at point of sale.
 - Allow the buyer to handle the equid where safe and appropriate.
 - Ensure the buyer's skill level matches their claims.
 - Be prepared to end the viewing if welfare or safety is compromised.
 - Ask about the buyer's facilities to ensure the new environment will meet the equid's needs. Be honest about the equid's requirements and history.

Part 3: Assessing welfare

The “five domains of animal welfare model” provides a useful framework for assessing equid welfare by considering how physical and functional factors influence an equid’s mental state and overall quality of life. The model examines four interlinked domains (nutrition, environment, health and behaviour) and which collectively shape the fifth domain (mental, or “affective” state), reflecting how the equid feels about its situation.

Internal factors linked to survival, such as thirst, hunger or pain, drive behaviour and emotional experience. When these needs are met, equids are more likely to experience positive mental states, while unmet needs result in negative experiences. Effective welfare assessment therefore combines resource-based measures (such as diet, housing, turnout and social opportunities) with animal-based measures, including health, body condition, injuries and behavioural indicators such as stress, social interactions and movement.



A horse lying down in a field. Image supplied and permission for use granted by T Coombs.

Using this balanced approach provides a clearer picture of how equids are coping physically and mentally and the balance of positive and negative experiences they

encounter. This approach helps owners and keepers identify problems early, while also promoting positive welfare outcomes and improved quality of life.

Behavioural indicators of equid welfare

Welfare is all about how an animal feels. Since we cannot ask equids how they feel, we must observe their behaviour to understand their well-being. However, no single behaviour gives the full story. It is important to consider the situation, the way the behaviour is performed, and the behaviour itself. Changes in an equid's usual demeanour can also show that their welfare has shifted. If you notice a change, it might be time to get advice from a veterinary surgeon or a qualified behaviour professional.

Understanding how equids behave and recognising signs of anxiety, fear and distress is crucial for reducing negative experiences and ensuring they have a life worth living, whilst recognising positive emotions such as contentment, and helping to ensure a good quality of life. Those responsible for caring for equids should learn about equid behaviour and understand the signs of both good and poor welfare, in order to provide the best possible care.

Indicators of good welfare

- The ability to lie down, rest, and roll over.
- A calm and coordinated behaviour when in a group.
- Strong, stable social bonds, such as resting or grazing closely together or mutual grooming.
- Interest in and interaction with their surroundings.
- Opportunities for the equid to make choices, which can reduce boredom and decrease restless behaviours as well as giving them a sense of control over aspects of their life.
- Positive interactions with people.
- No signs of pain or other behaviours that might indicate poor welfare.

Behavioural signs needing further investigation

Some behaviours might show long-term poor welfare and could become normal for an equid, but they still need attention. Changes in behaviour such as an increase in how often something happens or the appearance of new behaviours, should also be taken seriously. These include:

- Not lying down or being unable to roll over.
- Collapsing or stumbling due to lack of sleep or lameness.
- Being aggressive towards or avoiding people.
- Being aggressive towards or avoiding other equids.
- Showing little interest in the environment, other animals, or humans.
- Significant changes in daily activities (for example, less grazing and more resting).

- Becoming isolated or not keeping up with the group.
- Spending too long being alert (watching, listening, calling, seeking, or spooking).
- Rebound behaviours (such as bucking and galloping) when turned out (which might seem positive at first but suggest restrictive management).
- Excessive anticipatory behaviours (such as banging on doors, repetitive oral actions, or pacing by the box or fence) that could develop into abnormal repetitive behaviours. Early management can help prevent these from getting worse.
- Change in ridden or driven behaviour and/or reduction in performance.

Pain-related behaviours

Signs that an equid might be in pain include:

- Hesitation to turn or move forward.
- Body tension.
- A tucked or guarded posture.
- Lameness.
- Excessive rolling or watching their sides.
- Increased aggression.
- When being ridden:
 - tail swishing,
 - head tossing,
 - opening the mouth,
 - Bucking,
 - Rearing,
 - Spooking,
 - rushing, refusing or running out at jumps,
 - reluctance to go forwards,
 - appears grumpy or unhappy when tacked up.

Knowledge and training for keepers

It is important that all owners and keepers regularly access information and training to ensure they remain up-to-date with their knowledge on how best to care for their equid.

For more information contact the National Equine Welfare Council: www.newc.co.uk.

Concerned about a horse, pony or donkey?

If you are concerned about an equid's welfare, you can report your concerns to a number of organisations. All reports will be managed by an experienced and knowledgeable team and are treated in the strictest confidence. Link to information on reporting a concern: [Reporting a welfare concern - National Equine Welfare Council](#).

To help the organisation assess and progress your concern as quickly as possible, please have the following information ready before contacting the organisation:

- the exact location of the equid(s),
- clear details of the specific welfare concerns,
- a description of each equid at the location,
- when you last saw the equid(s).

If you have not witnessed the situation yourself, please ask someone with first-hand knowledge to contact the organisation directly.

Glossary of terms

Term	Description
Allied professionals	Individuals who work alongside owners and keepers to support equid health, behaviour and welfare, such as veterinary surgeons, farriers, equine dentists, behaviourists, nutritionists and physiotherapists.
Biosecurity	Procedures or measures designed to protect against the spread of or contact with harmful biological or biochemical substances.
Equid	A member of the family Equidae, including horses, donkeys, zebras and their hybrids, such as mules and hinnies.
Equine passport	An official identification document required by law for equids in the UK and EU, containing details such as identity, ownership, and medication status, and used for disease control and food chain safety.
Equid welfare	The physical and mental state of an equid in relation to the conditions in which it lives and is managed.
Forage	Plant-based fibre, such as grass, hay, haylage, or browse, that forms the primary component of an equid's diet and supports digestive health and natural feeding behaviour.
Hybrid	A cross between a horse and donkey with unique physiological and behavioural characteristics that they inherit from both parents.
Person responsible	A person as responsible for an animal if they have charge of them on a permanent or temporary basis.
PIO	Passport Issuing Organisation
Quarantine	A state, period, or place of isolation in which people or animals that may have been exposed to infectious disease are placed.
ScotEquine card	A secure, plastic equine identification card containing statutory details.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Equid-centred quarantine and isolation plan

This quarantine plan is designed to protect equid health and welfare while minimising stress and fear to the equid. It prioritises the equid's physical and mental needs alongside robust biosecurity, using evidence-based, proportionate and compassionate practices.

Core Principles:

- Equid-centred decision-making: the equid's welfare is the primary consideration at all stages.
- Alignment with the five domains model: management considers nutrition, physical environment, health, behaviour, and mental state, recognising their cumulative impact on welfare.
- Proportional biosecurity: measures are risk-based and no more restrictive than necessary.
- Veterinary-led oversight: quarantine decisions are informed by veterinary risk assessment, diagnostics and ongoing clinical guidance.
- Transparency and accountability: clear records, responsibilities and review points.
- Continuous welfare monitoring: early identification of stress, illness or behavioural change.

This plan applies to all equids entering quarantine or requiring isolation due to:

- New arrivals to a premises.
- Disease risk exposure or unknown health history.

Veterinary oversight:

- A veterinary surgeon should be involved in determining quarantine duration, testing protocols and biosecurity measures.
- Veterinary examination on arrival, where indicated by risk assessment or welfare concerns.
- Diagnostic testing (e.g. strangles screening, blood tests) guided by veterinary advice.
- Ongoing veterinary input where quarantine exceeds standard durations or where mental wellbeing is compromised.

Quarantine duration:

- Standard period: 14–21 days, based on disease risk assessment and veterinary advice.
- Adjustments: duration may be shortened or extended following veterinary risk assessment, diagnostic testing or welfare considerations.

Pre-arrival planning:

- Conduct a risk assessment considering origin, transport history, vaccination status, previous testing and clinical signs.
- Prepare a dedicated quarantine area in advance.
- Ensure availability of:
 - Separate equipment (buckets, grooming tools, mucking out tools).
 - PPE where appropriate.
 - Cleaning and disinfection supplies.

Quarantine environment:

Quarantine management must actively support all five domains of animal welfare, recognising that disease prevention measures can affect both physical and mental wellbeing:

- Physically separated from resident equids (minimum practical distance; no nose-to-nose contact).
- Visual contact with other equids where possible to reduce social isolation.
- Safe, secure fencing and clear signage.
- Clean, well-ventilated stable or shelter, or field with:
 - Adequate space to lie down, turn, and rest comfortably.
 - Dry, comfortable bedding.
 - Good natural light and airflow without draughts.
- For equids that are stabled, turnout should be provided daily.
- Continuous access to forage to support gut health and reduce stress.
- Predictable daily routine.

Daily care and management:

- Maintain the equid's usual diet where possible.
- Any feed changes made gradually and only if necessary.
- Fresh water provided at all times.
- Avoid unnecessary procedures.
- In-hand walking or light exercise if clinically appropriate.
- Opportunities for movement and exploration without compromising biosecurity.
- Monitor appetite and water intake.
- Monitor behaviour and demeanour.
- Monitor manure consistency and frequency.

Biosecurity measures:

- Dedicated clothing, footwear, and equipment for quarantine area.
- Hand hygiene before and after contact.
- Quarantine equids cared for after resident equids.
- Manure and waste managed to prevent cross-contamination.

- Regular cleaning and disinfection of surfaces and equipment using equine-safe products.

Welfare safeguards:

- Monitor for signs of stress, anxiety, depression, or stereotypic behaviour.
- Adjust management promptly if welfare concerns arise.
- Quarantine must never be used as isolation or punishment.
- Social needs considered at all times, balancing infection risk and welfare.

Release from quarantine/isolation:

Final release decisions must be supported by veterinary guidance, ensuring both disease risk mitigation and individual welfare considerations are met. An equid may exit quarantine when:

- The minimum quarantine period has been completed.
- No clinical signs of infectious disease are present.
- Any required tests are negative.
- A final welfare and health check has been completed.

Appendix 2: emergency planning for equids

1. Strategic guidance for authorities and planners

Preparing for emergencies is essential for protecting both people and animals. Emergencies that affect human communities, such as flooding, fire, severe weather, extreme heat or cold, or disruption to critical infrastructure, will also affect the equids who live within those communities. In line with the National Risk Register, the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, and the responsibilities of Scotland's Regional and Local Resilience Partnerships, equids must be explicitly considered within local and national emergency planning arrangements.

[The Regional Resilience Partnerships' Risk Preparedness Assessment - Ready Scotland](#) promotes a whole-of-society, all-risks, consequence-based approach. This means planning for the effects of emergencies rather than trying to predict every possible cause. Many emergencies, regardless of origin, result in similar consequences, including displacement, restricted access, interrupted feed or water supply, behavioural distress, damage to stables or grazing areas, and reduced capacity for veterinary care.

Integrating these foreseeable consequences into existing risk assessments ensures that planning remains efficient, proportionate and free from unnecessary duplication. Embedding equid welfare within established emergency preparedness processes also supports consistent decision-making and reflects the practical realities of responding to incidents involving equids, whose behavioural and handling needs require thoughtful consideration during periods of disruption.

2. Emergency preparedness for owners and keepers

Everyone responsible for an equid has a duty to consider how they will meet their animal's welfare needs during reasonably foreseeable emergencies. A simple, practical emergency plan enables custodians to make informed decisions before, during and after an incident, and to act quickly when normal routines are disrupted.

An effective plan should reflect local risks and the consequence-based categories described in the Scottish RRP guidance, including:

Human Casualties:

If you or your team are injured, ill or unable to attend the animals:

- ensure a trusted alternative caregiver has a copy of your emergency plan,
- keep essential information visible and accessible for emergency responders,
- provide instructions on access, handling, and any special needs.

[Displacement:](#)

Emergencies may require temporary or prolonged relocation.

Evacuation:

- identify safe refuge locations,
- secure appropriate transport for equids (noting behavioural or handling needs),
- maintain several days' supply of forage, water and essential medications,
- understand the capabilities of any local Community Animal Response Teams (CARTs).

Sheltering in place:

- assess whether it is safe for you and the equids to remain,
- maintain sufficient water, forage and shelter for several days,
- share access and welfare information with emergency and veterinary responders if you must evacuate without the animals.

Damage to infrastructure:

Emergencies may disrupt buildings, fencing, grazing, water pumps, electricity, communication systems or transport routes. Plans should include:

- alternative water sources or storage,
- backup feed provision,
- safe areas for temporary relocation within the property,
- arrangements for care until essential services are restored.

Planning ahead reduces risk, supports all five domains of equine wellbeing, and enables emergency services and veterinary professionals to act safely and effectively when responding to incidents involving equids.



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