

Biosecurity in animal evacuation centres

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Animal Biosecurity, NSW DPI

What is the risk?

Congregations of animals from different origins at an evacuation centre present biosecurity risks that require consideration due to increased risk of exposure and spread of infectious diseases. There are some simple things which can be done to reduce disease spread within an evacuation centre and to avoid bringing diseases back home when animals return.

Know who to contact

When you first arrive at the centre it is important to know who to contact if you have an issue or query. Often there may be a dedicated area where sick animals can be isolated if infectious diseases are suspected. Many larger centres such as showgrounds already have their own site Biosecurity Plan which will have information about how biosecurity is managed on the site and who is the contact person for biosecurity queries.

Induction to the centre

When you first arrive at the centre, information will usually be collected to record details about the animals and the animal owners. This is important in case animals get lost or need to be located among large groups of animals. There are occasions when someone other than the owner might have to find an animal and a permanent identification tag or microchip makes this process easier.

All animals must be appropriately restrained when not in a designated enclosure. Dogs must be on a leash when not caged. Injury or death could result if animals are in an unfamiliar environment and wander where there is vehicle traffic or other animals not under control.

What to do with sick animals

Animals who are sick may spread infection to other animals and in some cases to humans. It is important to get any sick animal examined by your vet as soon as possible. Many sites will

have a dedicated isolation area where sick animals can be held which will be identified by signs and marked on the site biosecurity plan.

Hygiene when dealing with animals

It is important to observe good hygiene by washing hands thoroughly after handling animals. Where an infectious disease is suspected, disposable gloves are recommended. Alcohol hand sanitisers are very useful by providing disinfection without needing to have water and are readily available in small pump action dispensers. If you have an existing medical condition that affects your immunity, either avoid contact with sick animals or use a face mask, long sleeves and gloves.

Sick animals should be isolated away from healthy animals and ensure they have separate feed and water bowls. They should be attended to after healthy animals to reduce the risk of transmitting infection on clothing, hands, footwear, equipment and tack. Strangles in horses, parvovirus infection in dogs and flu in cats are examples of infectious diseases that can spread rapidly if these biosecurity standards are relaxed.

It is very important not to share items like leads, halters and blankets between animals when dealing with suspect infectious diseases. More detailed advice on managing infectious diseases can be found on the NSW DPI website and from veterinarians.

Vaccination status

Congregations of animal present an increased risk of exposure and spread of infectious diseases. Animals who have a current vaccination status will be at a much lower risk of infection. This is particularly important for rapidly spreading diseases like parvovirus in dogs or strangles in horses and for dangerous zoonotic infections like Hendra Virus infection in horses.

Reducing risk of human infection

Human diseases acquired from animal are called zoonosis. Using good hygiene when handling animals goes a long way to preventing exposure. The highest risk arises from animals who are sick and showing symptoms. In some diseases, transmission of infection is possible in animals who are infected but not yet showing any abnormal symptoms. Hendra virus infection in unvaccinated horses is one example where this can occur.

Feed and water

Often the diet in the evacuation centre will be different from that at home. This may lead to digestion upsets and diarrhoea. You also need to watch out for mouldy feed as this can contain fungal mycotoxins. Report any concerns with feed to evacuation centre staff.

Water quality is also important. It should be clean of organic matter such as faeces and dirt and water containers should not be shared between owners.

Precautions when returning home

Before animals return home they should be dewormed and treated for external parasites such as fleas, lice and ticks. Livestock should be confined to a small area for 2-3 weeks in case they pass any noxious weed seeds in their faeces. Feet of sheep and goats should be checked for footrot, trimmed and given a footbath if you suspect a problem. If in doubt, call your veterinarian.

Additional biosecurity resources for emergencies

1. Animal Owner Information at Evacuation sites
http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/447839/information-animal-owner-info-evacuation-sites.pdf
2. Get ready animals
<https://www.ses.nsw.gov.au/get-ready-animals/get-ready-animals-splash-page/get-ready-animals/>
3. Livestock safety in emergencies
https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/708088/Livestock-safety-in-disasters.pdf
4. safeguarding your stock before and after a natural disaster
<https://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au/safeguarding-your-stock-before-and-after-a-natural-disaster/>

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