



## HEALTH HAZARDS IN THE THOROUGHBRED BREEDING INDUSTRY (UK)

The horse breeding industry presents a range of health hazards arising from working with horses, machinery, biological materials, chemicals, and challenging environmental conditions. Identifying and managing these hazards is essential to protect staff health, ensure animal welfare, and meet UK health and safety legal requirements.

Health hazards can be more impactful than safety failures, and unfortunately, individuals may not be aware of the consequences until it is too late.

### Legal responsibilities

Employers have duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety, and welfare of employees. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to assess workplace risks and implement appropriate control measures. Additional regulations may apply depending on the specific hazard.

### Biological hazards

Working with horses exposes staff to biological risks, including zoonotic diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans, such as ringworm and Salmonella. Tetanus and leptospirosis can also be hazards in yard environments. Contact with bodily fluids, manure, and soiled bedding also presents infection risks. Good hygiene practices, including regular handwashing, appropriate PPE, and prompt reporting of illness, are essential to reduce exposure.

### Dust, respiratory, and airborne hazards

Dust from hay, straw, bedding, and arenas can contain mould spores, bacteria, and allergens. Prolonged exposure may contribute to respiratory conditions such as asthma, allergic reactions, or farmer's lung.

Control measures include good ventilation, dampening dusty materials, using low-dust bedding, and wearing suitable respiratory protective equipment where required.

### Chemical hazards

Stud farms may use chemicals such as disinfectants, veterinary medicines, pesticides, fuels, oils, and cleaning products. Incorrect storage, handling, or mixing can cause burns, respiratory irritation, poisoning, or long-term health effects.

Chemicals should be stored securely, clearly labelled, and used in accordance with manufacturer instructions and COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002) requirements.

## Physical and ergonomic hazards

Manual handling of feed, bedding, and equipment, along with repetitive tasks and awkward postures, can lead to musculoskeletal disorders. Slips, trips, and falls are common due to uneven ground, wet surfaces, and outdoor working environments.

Risk assessments, training, mechanical aids, good housekeeping, and appropriate footwear help reduce these risks.

## Noise and vibration

Exposure to noise from machinery and vehicles can lead to hearing damage, fatigue, and communication difficulties. Vibration from hand-held tools or vehicles may cause musculoskeletal or circulatory problems.

Employers must assess and control exposure in line with the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 and the Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005.

## Mental health and stress

Long hours, seasonal workload peaks, high responsibility for animal welfare, emotional strain, and rural isolation can impact mental health. Stress and fatigue may increase the likelihood of accidents and ill health.

Promoting open communication, reasonable working hours, rest breaks, and access to support helps manage mental health risks.

## Monitoring and review

Health hazards should be reviewed regularly through risk assessments, staff feedback, and incident reporting. Health surveillance may be required where exposure risks are significant.

## Summary

The breeding industry involves diverse health hazards, including biological, chemical, respiratory, physical, noise-related, and mental health risks. By identifying hazards, carrying out effective risk assessments, and applying appropriate control measures, breeders can protect staff health, comply with UK legislation, and promote a safe and sustainable working environment.

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