



## MANUAL HANDLING GUIDANCE FOR THOROUGHBRED BREEDERS (UK)

Manual handling is a significant health and safety risk within the equine industry and can lead to serious musculoskeletal injuries if not properly managed.

### Legal responsibilities – manual handling

Manual handling duties are set out in the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended).

Under these Regulations, employers must, so far as is reasonably practicable:

- Avoid hazardous manual handling where possible
- Assess the risk of injury from manual handling operations that cannot be avoided
- Reduce the risk of injury to the lowest level reasonably practicable

These duties apply to employees and, in practice, should also inform how contractors, trainees, and casual workers are managed on stud farms and breeding yards.

### Identifying manual handling risks

Common manual handling activities on breeding premises include lifting and carrying hay and straw bales, feed bags, water containers, mucking out, moving equipment, and restraining horses. Risks are increased by heavy or awkward loads, repetitive tasks, poor posture, uneven or slippery surfaces, tight spaces, fatigue, time pressure and the unpredictability of live animals.

### Risk assessment and control measures

Where manual handling cannot be avoided, a suitable and sufficient risk assessment must be carried out. This should consider the task, the load, the working environment, and the individual carrying out the work.

Control measures may include:

- Using mechanical aids such as wheelbarrows, barrows with pneumatic tyres, trolleys, forklifts, or hoists.
- Breaking loads down into smaller, lighter units.
- Using appropriate tack and restraints.
- Improving stable and store layouts to reduce carrying distances.
- Ensuring good flooring, lighting, and housekeeping.
- Rotating tasks to reduce repetition and fatigue.

### Safe handling techniques

Staff should be trained in safe manual handling techniques, including assessing loads before lifting, maintaining good posture, bending at the knees, keeping loads close to the body, avoiding twisting, and knowing when to seek assistance. Staff should never attempt to lift loads that are beyond their capability. When handling horses and foals, care should be taken to avoid sudden movements, poor footing, or situations where the animal may panic, as this can increase the risk of injury.

## Information, training, and supervision

All staff should receive manual handling information and training appropriate to their role and experience. This should include instruction on risk assessments, use of mechanical aids, and safe working practices. Training should be refreshed periodically and supported by effective supervision.

Young workers, new starters, and those returning from injury may require additional support and monitoring.

## Individual capability and welfare

Employers must take into account individual capability, including physical strength, experience, pregnancy, existing injuries, or health conditions. Workers should be encouraged to report discomfort or injuries early so that tasks can be adjusted and further harm prevented.

## Review and ongoing management

Manual handling risks should be reviewed regularly and whenever working practices change, new equipment is introduced, or an injury occurs. By applying the principles of the Manual Handling Operations Regulations and promoting a culture of safe working, breeders can significantly reduce the risk of injury and support the long-term health and welfare of their workforce.

## Summary

Effective manual handling management protects people, supports welfare, and improves efficiency. Through risk assessment, training, and the use of appropriate aids, breeders can meet their legal duties and create safer working environments.

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