



BRC Flu Vaccination Statement – 8 November 2019

We're aware of questions that have been raised by some members over the incoming rule which mandates six monthly boosters against Equine Influenza (EI) (see rule changes below) and would like to provide further information about the rationale behind this decision.

For much of 2019, the UK has been affected by outbreaks of EI with the number of cases peaking in July. As a department of the BHS, which is a member body of the BEF, BRC has the welfare of equines competing under our rules at the forefront of our minds at all times—and it's our responsibility, along with every horse owner, to help negate the spread of this virus.

Throughout the year, we've been listening to advice and evidence from our veterinary and industry colleagues on the BEF High Health Steering Group, the Equine Infectious Disease Advisory Group and the Animal Health Trust (AHT). Unlike some other organisations, we took the decision not to make a mid-season rule change during the initial outbreak, instead strongly recommending that a six month booster be given, while continually monitoring the situation.

As a result of the outbreak this year, a number of competition venues have taken the decision to mandate six monthly boosters. This has led to some confusion among members as to the different vaccination requirements from venue to venue, which has necessitated additional checks before competing. Indeed some areas have had to run qualifiers stipulating a six monthly booster is mandatory in order to satisfy their venue owners.

We want to be as consistent as possible across all our qualifiers and championships, with a clear policy that all members can follow. It should also be noted that we are now in line with British Dressage, British Eventing and the FEI. However, we appreciate that this is a significant move, so we wanted to ensure that we considered the advice provided by veterinary experts before amending our competition rules. All of the evidence points to the efficacy of vaccinations reducing after six months, hence this decision taken by the BRC Advisory Committee.

In the most recent DEFRA AHT BEVA Equine Quarterly Disease Surveillance Report it was concluded:

That horse owners, especially those attending gatherings and events attended by other horses, undertake routine influenza vaccination and ideally adopt 6 monthly booster vaccination as this is currently considered 'gold standard' for controlling this infection.

Dr Jane Nixon MA VETMB BSC MRCVS, Chair of the BEF High Health Steering Group said "We're in the middle of an equine flu epidemic, with over 220 reported outbreaks alone so far in 2019 – an outbreak case includes a number of horses so there are thousands affected; marking a staggering increase on last year, when only two outbreaks were confirmed in the UK.

"We all need to help control the spread of the virus and vaccination unequivocally does just that. There have been several peer-reviewed scientific papers which support vaccination, including six monthly boosters, which should not leave any responsible horse owner in doubt that this is the right way forward."

The BRC qualifiers and championships are very large events. We regularly see in excess of 500 horses gathering together from the length and breadth of the UK. It is our responsibility to protect these events for our members, their horses and indeed the future of our sport.

We have noted that some members have commented that their horses have had an adverse reaction to a recent vaccination, and BRC would like to encourage any instances to be reported on the UK Government report portal here: <https://www.gov.uk/report-veterinary-medicine-problem>. This should be in addition to reporting the reaction to your veterinary surgeon.

2020 BRC Rule Change: From 1 January 2020, it will be strongly advised when competing at BRC events to have a flu vaccination within 6 months and 21 days of the competition. From 1 March 2020, this will then become mandatory. The wording which will be added to the 2020 Handbook (changes in red) can be found [here](#).

IMPORTANT: This does not mean vaccinations need to be done every 6 months; it means that the vaccination needs to be within 6 months and 21 days of the competition. For example, if your competition was the 22 September, you would need to have a vaccination after the 1 March (1 March - 1 September = 6 months + 21 days = 22 September). This rule applies to Qualifiers and Championships only. Whilst we recommend that Clubs also follow this advice for Club activities, they remain autonomous and can therefore decide what they will require for their own training and events.