

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS



Department of Agricultural Resources

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BULLETIN 2020-08

To: Horseback Riding Schools and Stables / Boarding Stables

From: Division of Animal Health

Date: March 25, 2020

Re: COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Guidance for Horseback Riding Schools and Stables / Boarding Stables

Governor Charlie Baker issued an emergency order requiring all businesses and organizations that do not provide "COVID-19 Essential Services" to close their physical workplaces and facilities to workers, customers and the public as of Tuesday, March 24th at noon until May 4, or until further notice.

The list of essential services under the Food & Agriculture section includes, "Organizations and workers responsible for the care and custody of animals, pets and livestock." The Department recognizes that this has left a gray area for some horse stables. The following information is meant to clarify what equine activities may continue and which should be halted at this time.

Horseback Riding Schools and Stables

Horseback riding lessons are not an essential service and should cease immediately.

The care of the horses kept at licensed riding stables is deemed an essential service and must continue. Horses must be fed and watered, and stalls must be cleaned. Horses may be turned out or ridden to provide adequate exercise. These tasks should be performed by the fewest number of people necessary to complete the job. If the number of horses require a significant number of staff to be present, consider developing a schedule that can stagger the work so the number of people in the barn at any one time can be kept to a minimum. The horses should receive all of the care that they need, and their caretakers should be taking all appropriate precautions and practicing social distancing.

Full-Board, Partial-Board and Rough-Board Boarding Stables

Boarding stables providing full-board services that meet all of the horses' needs may set their own policies about restricting access by owners seeking to visit or ride horses. The Department supports limitations imposed by stable owners. Protecting themselves and their staff by disallowing owners access over the next couple of weeks for any purpose beyond necessary care is an appropriate step given the current situation. If there are specific needs for an individual animal that owners feel are not being met, the horse owner and stable owner will need to address these issues together. No one should have an expectation that this arrangement will be ideal - we should be providing the best care possible under the circumstances.

Partial-Board and Rough-Board stables should work out a schedule for horse owners so they can stagger the times people come and go to ensure a minimal number of people are at the barn at any given time. Riding is not prohibited, but it must be done so that the principles of social distancing and disease control are maintained. No one should have an expectation that they can come and go as they would under normal circumstances - these are not normal circumstances.

Each barn has a different capacity, different levels of service available or provided, and different capabilities in providing all the care the horses need. This guidance document cannot cover every single scenario. People are going to have to use common sense and do the best they can for the horses while ensuring that they are taking all of the necessary steps to protect themselves and everyone else around them.

Whether working together while maintaining “social distancing” or operating during separate shifts please keep in mind all of the common shared surfaces that barn staff will encounter. Water faucets, cross ties, doorknobs, and handles of brooms, shovels, forks, and wheelbarrows are all of concern. Some of these items can be decontaminated fairly easily. Halters, lead ropes, and tack cannot. Please be aware of these issues and do your best to mitigate risk and potential cross contamination.

The Department wants to ensure the health and welfare of the animals while mitigating the risk to the people engaged in those tasks. Ensuring your horse has adequate care is not permission to ignore the Governor’s directives to do your part in stopping the spread of Covid-19. We are in this together and everyone needs to do their part so that these restrictions will be in place for the shortest time possible.

If you have any questions about this Bulletin, please contact Michael Cahill, Director of Animal Health, Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, at (617) 626-1794 or Michael.Cahill@mass.gov.