

What is Equine Coronavirus?

Equine Coronavirus, or ECoV, is nothing new, it was first detected in the United States of America in 1999. ECoV is not linked to Covid-19 and cannot be transmitted to humans.

Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic, there is an understandable concern associated with the term Coronavirus, but there are a large number of these viruses, and the vast majority only result in mild symptoms. One of the most prevalent Coronaviruses in humans is the common cold.

The equine variety, ECoV, is endemic in a number of countries, including Japan, and is also present in the United States of America, parts of Europe and the Middle East.

ECoV usually causes only mild gastrointestinal issues such as diarrhoea and possibly colic symptoms. Other clinical signs are fever, lethargy and anorexia (lack of appetite).

The current Covid-19 pandemic has of course caused increasing concerns around Coronaviruses. In light of this, the Japan Racing Association (JRA) last week informed the FEI that a group of working horses at the Tokyo Racecourse, which is not an Olympic or Paralympic venue, was found to have ECoV antibodies in March 2020. Of these, 15 had symptoms of ECoV. There were no severe cases, and all horses recovered within 2-3 days.

Additionally, ECoV was reported in Switzerland in the International Collating Centre report published on 1 February 2021.

There is no requirement to report ECoV to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) as it is not a notifiable disease. In fact, the OIE does not include any information on the disease on the website. Similarly, there is no requirement to report ECoV to the authorities in Japan.

Some facts about ECoV

- ECoV is a disease that affects the enteric (intestinal) system of horses.
- Only about 25% of infected horses show clinical signs
- Around 20% of affected horses have signs of colic
- Horses become infected with ECoV by ingesting the virus shed in the faeces of an infected horse
- Horses can shed the ECoV virus for between three to 25 days
- Since 2010 when the ECoV PCR monitoring system was established in the USA, outbreaks of ECoV have been seen in Japan, parts of Europe, the United States and the Middle East

Biosecurity measures in place for the Tokyo Olympic & Paralympic Games

What is the risk from ECoV to horses competing at the Tokyo Olympic & Paralympic Games?

The equine health status in Japan is extremely high and is formally recognised as such by both the OIE and the European Union.

Tokyo Racecourse is not a Games venue. Olympic and Paralympic horses will not come into contact with any domestic horses. They will be transported bubble-to-bubble from the airport to the main venue at Baji Koen (EQP); EQP to Sea Forest (SFC) for Eventing cross country; and from EQP back to the airport.

All Olympic and Paralympic horses, no matter where they travel from, are subject to a seven-day quarantine period in the country of departure prior to entering the Equestrian Park venue. It is not anticipated that any horses participating at the Games will originate from Japan,

however, should any of the Japanese domestic horses qualify, they will be subject to the same seven-day quarantine period in Japan prior to their arrival at EQP.

In addition, Japan will self-declare an Equine Disease Free Zone (EDFZ) to the OIE ahead of the Games covering both the equestrian venues (EQP and SFC), Haneda and Narita airports and the transportation routes.

What biosecurity measures will be in place at the venues?

The sanitary protocols in place at both venues (EQP and SFC) include meticulous cleaning and disinfection of stables prior to the arrival of horses and on an ongoing basis after the arrival of horses, collection and removal of waste and manure, cleaning and disinfection of the isolation units and the Veterinary Clinic facilities.

No persons, including veterinarians, farriers, volunteers, or other workers shall have contact with any horses outside the Equestrian Park and SFC without showering and changing into freshly laundered clothing and cleaned shoes before returning to and being in contact with any horse inside EQP or SFC.

The highest level of personal and stable hygiene practices must be maintained by everyone. This includes washing and disinfection of hands before and after contact with horses. Hand wash and disinfection facilities will be provided in each stable block. Shoes must be cleaned by using the foot mats provided at stable block entrances. The maintenance of clean stalls is mandatory.

Only authorised personnel will have access to competition areas and stables.

All vehicles and persons entering either EQP or SFC from 6 July 2021 onwards will pass through a 'sanitary barrier' including vehicle wheel-wash, pedestrian footbaths and disinfection misting fan.

What about the transport vehicles?

Transport vehicles used to transfer horses from the airport to EQP and back again, and to transport Eventing horses from EQP to SFC and back again, will be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before use by Games horses. This cleaning and disinfection protocol also covers vehicles used to transport horse equipment, feedstuff, veterinary equipment and medicines.

What about the airports?

In addition to the very strict biosecurity measures in place at both EQP and SFC, and for the transport vehicles that will be used to take horses to the venues, there are also stringent sanitary protocols at both Haneda and Narita airports.

The transfer ramp used for the transfer of horses from air stalls into transport vehicles at the airports will be cleaned and disinfected before the arrival of each planeload of horses.

All persons who will come into contact with horses during the arrivals process will have clean, freshly laundered clothes, clean shoes, disinfected hands and no prior contact with equines (with the exception of other Olympic or Paralympic horses) for at least 24 hours without showering, changing clothing and footwear.

Lausanne (SUI), 4 February 2021