

## Equine Influenza & Import Controls Questionnaire 2019 – Summary of Findings

### Total responses:

From horse owners: **145**

From equestrian organisations: **15**

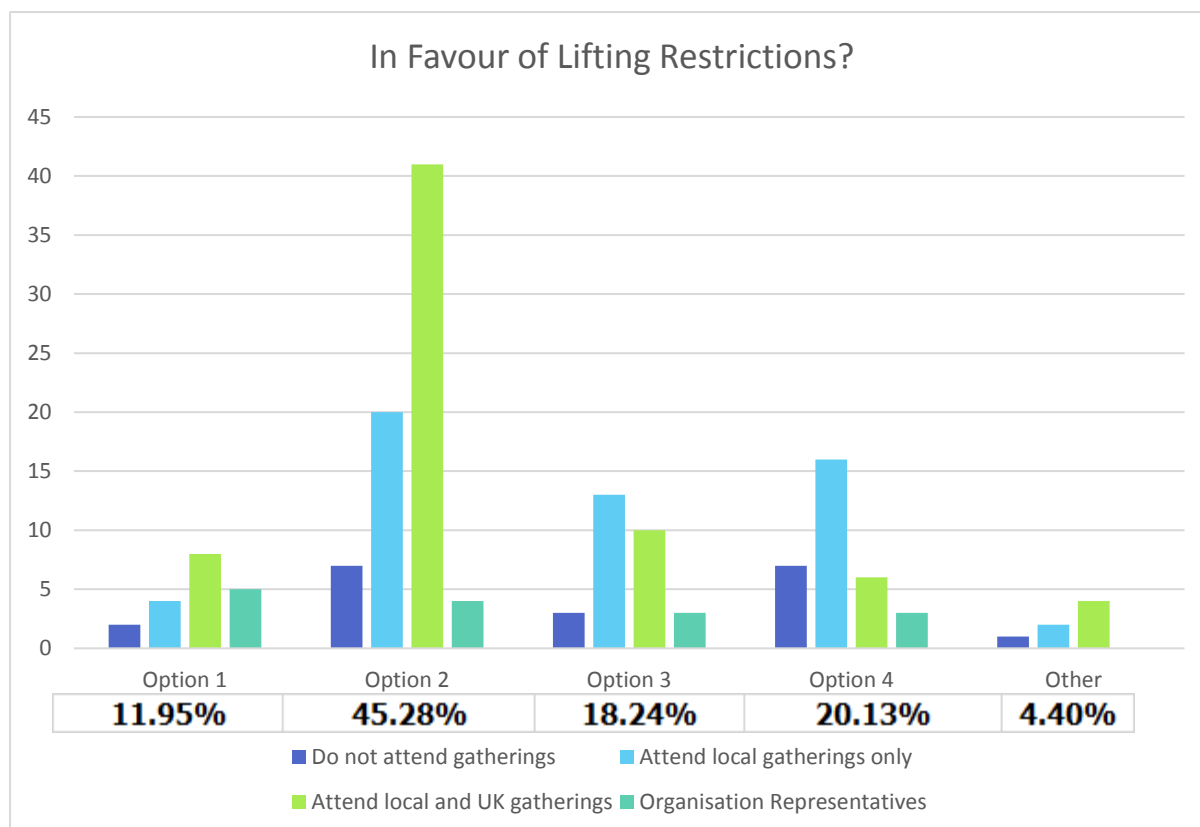
The main aim of the questionnaire was to help inform DEFA’s policy regarding horse import controls. Horse owners and equestrian organisation representatives answered the following question:

***“Broadly, would you be in favour of the 14 day post import isolation restriction being lifted?”***

By choosing one of five options:

1. *Yes, without any other controls*
2. *Yes, but only if local equestrian events/competitions/gatherings required all competitors to be fully vaccinated against Equine Influenza*
3. *No, the restriction should remain in place until the GB outbreak has run its course*
4. *No, the restriction should remain in place indefinitely as a disease control measure*
5. *Other (please specify)*

The responses are summarised below, divided into categories to show the difference of opinion between those who are most affected by the restriction (i.e. those who travel back and forth to the UK with their horses, and those who host local gatherings) and those who are less affected:



It is clear that **Option 2** (lifting the restrictions as long as local gatherings introduce compulsory vaccination) was the most favoured option overall. By category, it was the favoured option for those attending gatherings, both local only and both local and UK.

The next most popular option was **Option 4** (the restriction to remain in place indefinitely). As expected, this option was particularly favoured by those who do not attend gatherings, or attend locally only. The least favoured was **Option 1** (to lift the restriction without other controls) but for organisations was the most favoured. **Option 3** (the restriction to remain until the outbreak has run its course) was not particularly favoured by any category.

Several respondents selected “other” and suggested alternatives:

- **A shorter isolation period (7 days or 7-10 days).** However, for Equine Influenza 14 days is the minimum useful time period for effective isolation to prevent spread.
- **The isolation period to include time spent isolated in the UK.** Under our current legislation we cannot require horses to be isolated in the UK before travelling.
- **Separate guidelines for newly imported vs. returning horses.** We only have control over imports of horses, we have no data on exports, so would not be able to determine whether a horse was being imported for the first time or was re-entering the Island. The level of risk posed by newly imported vs. returning horses is discussed later on.
- **Imported horses to be vaccinated.** This option is discussed later on.

Given these findings we looked into the possibility of local gatherings (including shows, events and competitions) introducing compulsory vaccination:



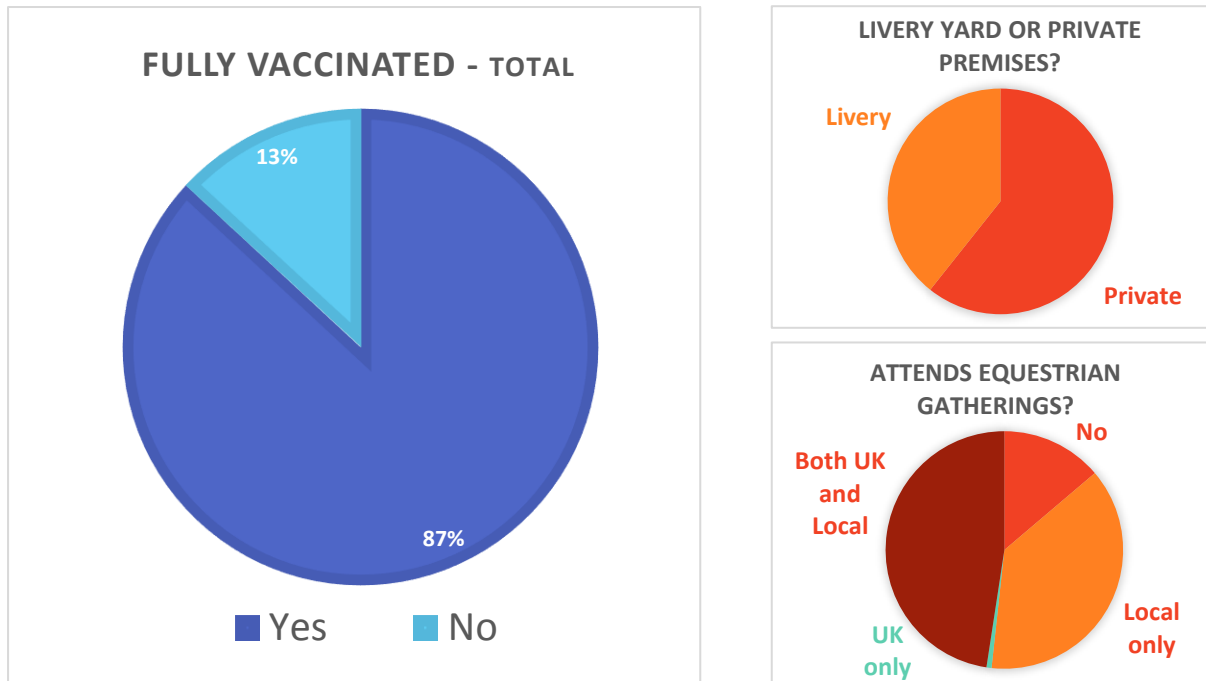
Of the 15 responses we had from organisations that host gatherings:

- One third already require vaccination;
- One third do not require vaccination but would be willing to make it compulsory;
- One third do not require vaccination and would not be willing to make it compulsory.

From this result it is clear that despite Option 2 – local gatherings to require vaccination and the restrictions to be lifted – being the most popular option, only two-thirds of local equestrian organisations would be willing to go down this route. For this reason we investigated alternative options, taking into account information from the questionnaire regarding vaccination.

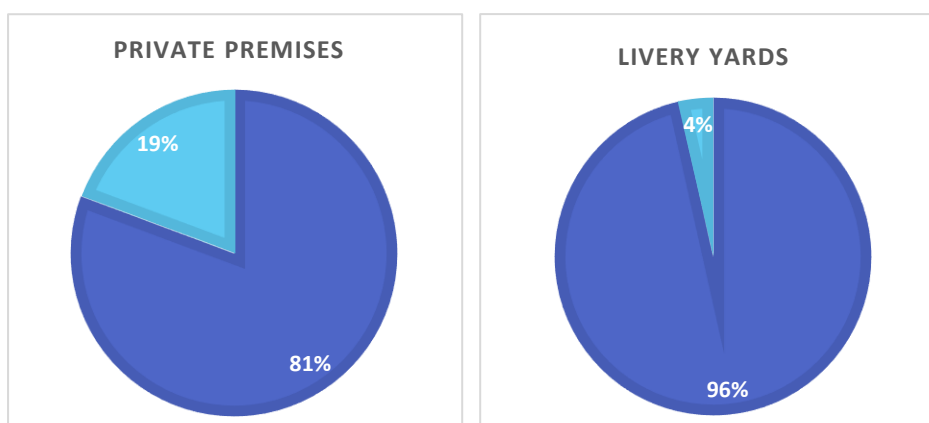
We asked horse owners to state:

- whether or not their horses are fully vaccinated;
- whether they are kept at a livery yard or private premises; and
- whether or not they intend to attend any local and/or UK gatherings this season:



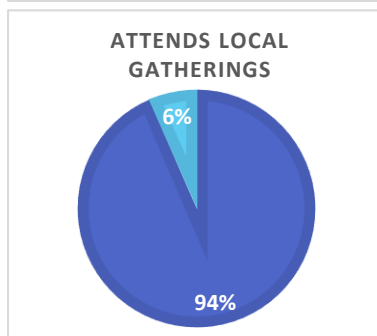
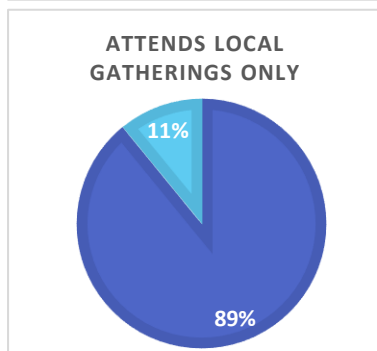
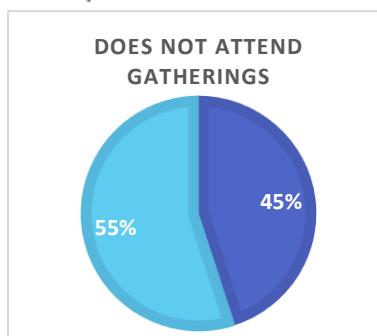
From this it can be seen that the majority of people responding to the questionnaire keep their horses fully vaccinated against Equine Influenza. However, nearly half of the questionnaire respondents were those who attend UK gatherings (which commonly require vaccination) so we broke down the data to give vaccination status as a percentage in each of the groups:

■ Fully Vaccinated ■ Unvaccinated



The vast majority of horses in this sample kept on livery yards are vaccinated. Not so many on private premises but still a large majority.

■ Fully Vaccinated ■ Unvaccinated

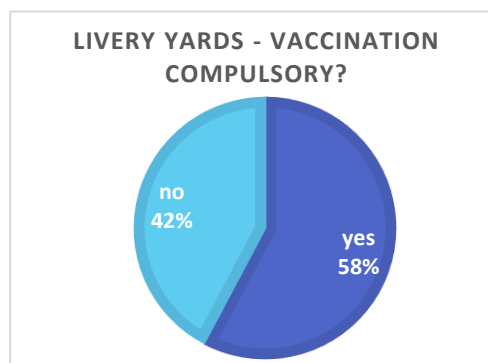


The risk of Equine Influenza to the Isle of Man:

- Local horses not mixing with other horses don't pose a risk of introduction or spread;
- Those attending local gatherings only don't pose a risk of introduction but **do pose a risk of spread**;
- Those attending locally and in the UK **pose a risk of introduction and spread**;
- Newly imported horses **pose a risk of introduction**;
- Returning horses more likely to have **recently mixed with other horses increasing the risk of introduction**;
- Imported/returning horses mixing with local horses, including **on livery yards** as well as at local gatherings, **pose a risk of introduction and spread**.

From the questionnaire data (left):

- Horses attending gatherings (including shows, events and competitions) much more likely to be vaccinated than those that don't;
- Those attending in the UK highly likely to be vaccinated.



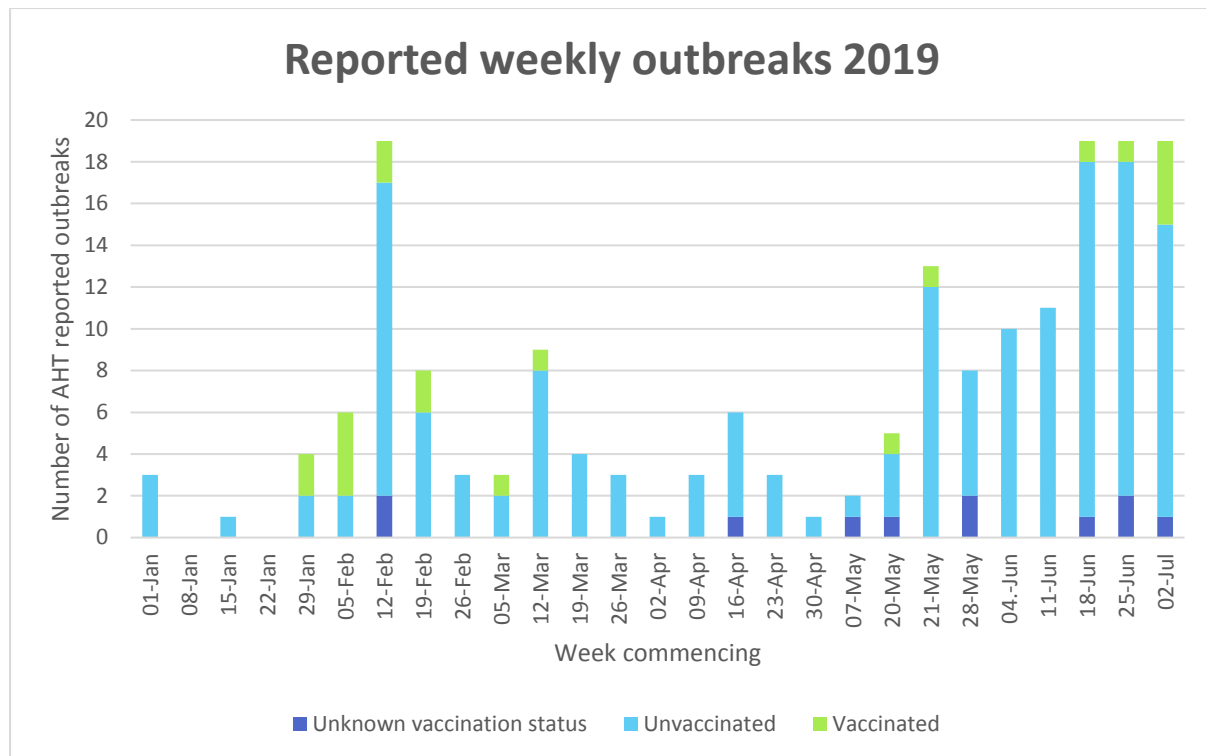
From the 26 livery yards represented we calculated how many were said to require compulsory Equine Influenza vaccination\* – see the chart above.

So, looking at the groups that pose a risk:

- Vaccination levels are very good for horses attending **gatherings in the UK**;
- Vaccination levels are nearly as good for horses attending **local gatherings**;
- Vaccination levels are very good for horses **on livery yards** despite this only being compulsory on (approximately) 58% of livery yards;
- We don't have any data for vaccination status of newly imported horses.

*\*note that this question was posed to horse owners who keep their horses on livery yards, rather than livery yard owners, so may not be entirely accurate as the answers were not always consistent.*

We can see that, for returning Manx horses at least, the numbers of **unvaccinated** horses posing a risk is very low. However, it is possible for Equine Influenza to be contracted and/or transmitted by **vaccinated** horses. We looked at the data collected by the Animal Health Trust to see how many outbreaks have been reported in Great Britain involving **vaccinated vs. unvaccinated** horses:



For more information please see <https://www.aht.org.uk/disease-surveillance/equiflunet>

In the first quarter (first 13 weeks) of 2019, the percentage of outbreaks that involved **vaccinated** horses was **19%**. This high figure caused concern that Equine Influenza vaccination was not protecting horses well enough against this strain (**Florida Clade 1**, a strain not commonly found in Europe, usually found in America). Given this, even imported/returning horses that are fully vaccinated would still pose a significant risk of introduction and spread of the disease. This informed our decision to introduce the import controls in the first place in February 2019.

In the second quarter, the percentage was down to **4%**, a much more reassuring figure for the effectiveness of vaccination.

Shortly after the questionnaire closed we reviewed the findings. Given the improved GB situation at that time (low numbers of outbreaks\* and very few involving vaccinated horses) and the questionnaire findings, we considered a compromise that ought to satisfy the majority of horse owners and organisations: **to require post-import isolation only for horses that are not fully vaccinated against Equine Influenza:**

- 14 days isolation would still be advised as best practice for biosecurity;
- Isolation could of course be voluntarily undertaken by horse owners or required by livery yards or organisations;

*\*note that there is a lag on AHT reported outbreaks being published on their webpage so the increase seen on the graph in late May was not evident at that time.*

- Those that travel back and forth to the UK (the vast majority of whom already vaccinate their horses) could attend local gatherings freely;
- Those that aren't the ones posing the risk of introduction, i.e. that attend local gatherings only, wouldn't be penalised by being required to vaccinate;
- Local gatherings would not need to require vaccination – any imported/returning horses would either be vaccinated anyway or been isolated;
- Those importing horses would have the choice of either isolation **or** vaccination – important as some horses cannot be vaccinated (i.e. young foals, or on veterinary advice) or would otherwise have to spend up to 6 months completing the vaccination course.

However it is clear that since the end of May the numbers of outbreaks have risen dramatically. While the early stages of the outbreak in January and February mostly affected racing thoroughbreds, the disease has now moved almost completely into leisure horses.

In addition, the most recent data from AHT (week commencing 02-Jul on the graph) shows a rise in the numbers of horses confirmed positive on nasal swab that are **vaccinated**. This increase can be explained by the fact that certain UK gatherings now require Equine Influenza screening for entrants and the swabs are submitted to AHT. There have been several confirmed positives from this, which demonstrates the fact that vaccinated horses can be **asymptomatic carriers** of Equine Influenza, i.e. they can carry the virus in their respiratory tract and transmit it to other horses without showing signs of infection themselves.

In light of this current situation in Great Britain, it therefore remains appropriate to keep the 14 day isolation requirement in place at the present time.

We would like to thank the Manx equestrian community for their input. The large number of responses to the questionnaire meant we could be confident that the findings were representative of the community as a whole.