

By now we are sure that everyone will have heard about the cases of Equine Influenza that have caused the suspension of racing until further tests reveal whether the infection has gone beyond a few horses in a single training yard. Hopefully, these tests will show that these were isolated cases and racing can be resumed, but we won't know this until next Monday at the earliest; and our Annual Open Day is scheduled only three days after this, on February 14th.

Having thought carefully about the pros and cons, we feel it would be inappropriate to hold our Open Day at this time, particularly since there is a risk that equine influenza can be spread by human contact – it simply wouldn't be fair to either our many visitors at the event or the horses based here, particularly in-foal mares and young foals. We are really sorry to have to take this action, because we enjoy meeting many of our clients and friends that day, but we felt we really had no choice.

The Thoroughbred Breeders Association (TBA) are holding a big event for members and mare owners at the Cheltenham 'Mares-only Race Day' on April 18th, and we hope to see many of those who were coming to our Open Day on that occasion. It should be a great day – so long as we are free of this blessed flu by then!

As regards the effect of the present situation on breeding activities, there are no reports of equine influenza on breeding premises to date. However, the TBA guidelines for mares visiting a stud are that ideally pregnant mares should have received a booster vaccination in the last 4-6 weeks before the foal is due, and both these and non-pregnant mares MUST have been vaccinated within the last 6 months.

Whilst infection is being seen in vaccinated horses, the veterinary advice is that vaccination remains essential since, even if the horse subsequently shows signs of infection, the illness is much less severe and it recovers much more quickly. The horse is also far less likely to pass on the infection.

Young foals are particularly at risk from this disease, since they cannot be inoculated and their only resistance to infection is the immunity passed on by their mother; hence a stud has to be particularly careful. Accordingly, we will be checking all passports for mares coming to the stud for confirmation that non-pregnant mares have received a booster vaccination within the 6 months prior to covering; ideally, for pregnant mares the last vaccination should be within 4-6 weeks of foaling, so that she passes on the best possible immunity to her foal.

We appreciate your understanding on this matter and we really look forward to seeing you at the stud in the near future. If we all act sensibly there is no reason why the racing programme should not be resumed fairly soon and why the most exciting time of the year for breeders, the stud season, should be affected in any more important way than the cancellation of our Open Day!