



The queens of clean

WHEN your horse is plastered in mud and you have the permanent aroma of muck heap, you'd be forgiven for not putting cleanliness top of your list of priorities. But for Jade Roberts, head competition groom to five-star event rider David Doel, hygiene standards are very much part of the job description.

"If I tip water out of a water bucket into a glass – would you want to drink it?" she asks.

With the welfare of top competition horses at stake, it's no wonder that Jade is so particular.

"Hygiene is extremely important – you're trying to eliminate any disease and health issues," she explains. "We try to keep the same standards at home, when travelling and at competitions. I do all the international competitions, and the

younger girls join me for the one-days at home, following the same procedures so everyone knows what they're doing."

GOOD hygiene is vital for equine health for three main reasons: it helps stop infections spreading from one horse to another, reduces a horse's exposure to harmful bacteria in its environment, and lowers the risk of pathogens (germs) passing between horses and the people who care for them.

Travelling horses to competitions, Jade is particularly concerned with hygiene in relation to their respiratory systems. "You don't want any coughs or snotty noses."

Abiee Olver is yard nurse manager at Liphook Equine Hospital. Hygiene and biosecurity are top priorities for her too.

"We care for in-patients such as newborn foals and horses with weakened immune systems, alongside some

isolation cases, so it's our most important focus," she says.

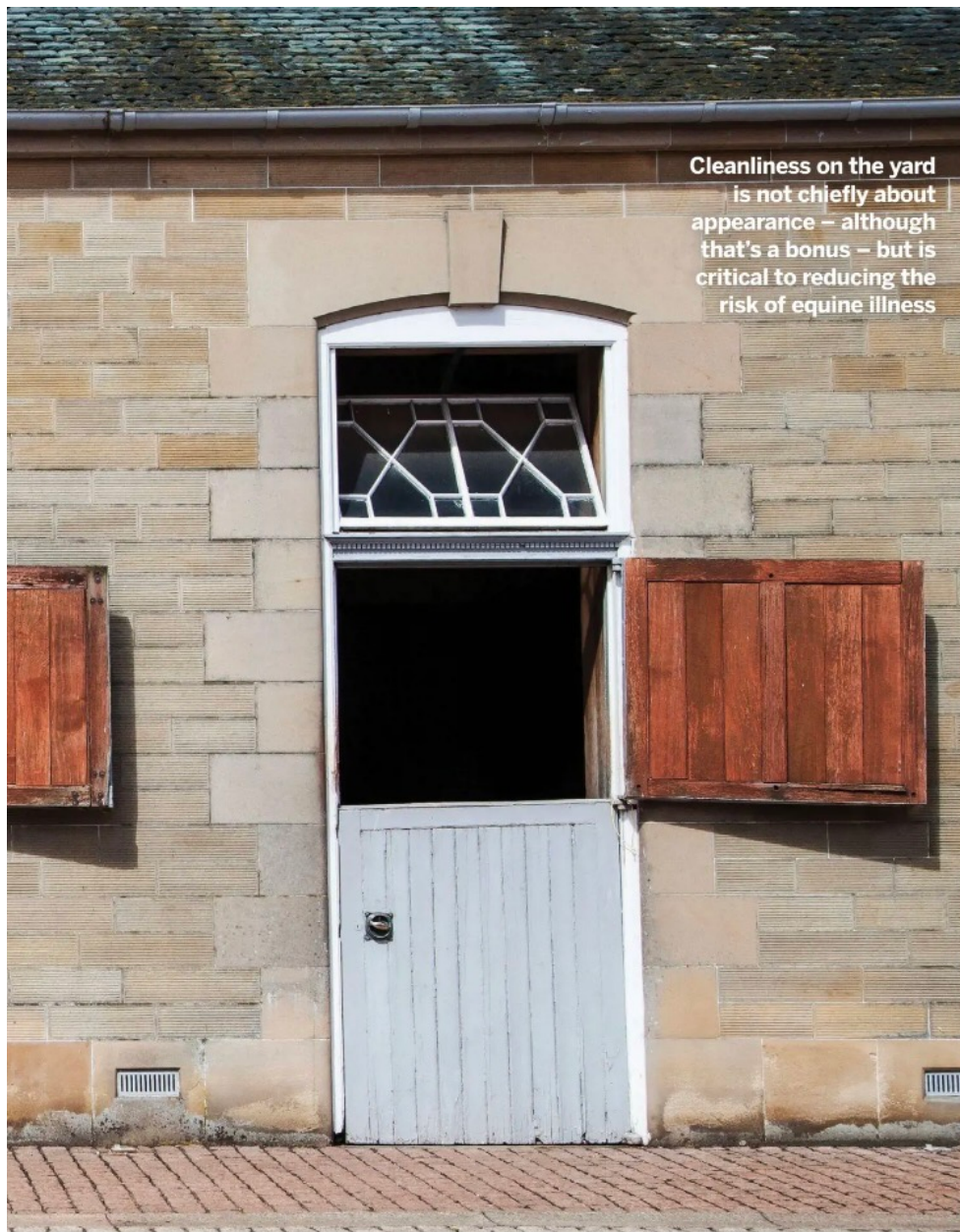
The team at Liphook follow strict protocols, including removing bedding, cleaning walls, and water and feed buckets.

"We wash our hands between patients, and any time we touch a horse for a medical procedure, we wear gloves," she continues.

Jayne Tansey is one of the yard supervisors at the Philip Leverhulme Equine Hospital.

"Hygiene and biosecurity within the hospital are a large part of the yard technicians' and nurses' roles," Jayne explains. "After every inpatient is discharged, the bedding is removed, and the stable is thoroughly cleaned. Stables are only reallocated to patient use following a negative environmental swab."

And it's not only the stables that are tested for bacteria.



Cleanliness on the yard is not chiefly about appearance – although that's a bonus – but is critical to reducing the risk of equine illness

How to deep clean a stable

JAYNE TANSEY is a yard supervisor at the Philip Leverhulme Equine Hospital. Here's her method:

- 1** Remove all faeces and urine, along with all the bedding, matting and equipment (buckets, string and so on).
 - 2** Empty and clean any associated drains.
 - 3** Remove dust from all fixtures, such as lights, heaters, pipes, hay racks and from the rafters and roof.
 - 4** Manually scrub walls and floors with an animal-safe general surface disinfectant to remove organic matter and clean grossly contaminated areas.
 - 5** Allow to dry, before replacing all the cleaned accessories.
 - 6** For a really thorough clean, repeat steps four and five.
- Speak to your local farm supplier for advice on the best chemicals to use. We use non-residue disinfectants that do not contaminate the environment, but naturally degrade to water.

Bucket slime is banished, their beds are immaculate and they are disinfectant demons. *Catherine Welton* gets a masterclass in yard hygiene from the pros

"Spot checks are carried out where any member of the team can have their hands swabbed at any point, which is sent to our onsite lab for analysis of bacteria."

AND while we don't need to go as far as swabbing our fellow liveries, Jayne points out that keeping on top of germs in our own stable management routine is important.

"You may not need hospital-level protocols at home, but biosecurity is still very relevant," she says. "Damp and warm environments such as stables and high touch areas act as the perfect bacterial breeding ground. Biofilms can form on these surfaces, building over time which can make it difficult to remove bacteria and disinfectant becomes less effective. So, it's important to clean 'high touch' areas such as tack rooms regularly."

Andrea O'Brien is company director at

Equine International Shipping in Ireland. "Hygiene is very important in the world of horse transportation, for a number of reasons," she says. "Mostly biosecurity for safeguarding against the spread of disease, bacterial, viral or fungal infections, for example, ringworm."

As well as maintaining hygiene standards for the horses in transit, they also have a layover yard where horses stay for their Department of Agriculture inspection, before leaving the country or on entry.

"Our layover stables have

composite walls and sealed floors," says Andrea. "We empty every bit of shavings out of the box and wash down the walls with a soft brush, with disinfectant. We have the soft, sealed floors, give those a brush down, let that dry and then later in the week we knapsack spray, then do all the feed pods, hay bars and the drinkers."

WHEN it comes to maintaining good hygiene on our own yards, there are some commonly overlooked areas.

"Like field troughs – when was the last time they were emptied and scrubbed out?" asks Rosina Lillywhite, head of nursing at Liphook. "Standing water is an ideal breeding ground for bacteria."

And in the stable, it's what lurks beneath that's often the problem.

"Many people use rubber mats, and the stable looks clean but debris and moisture can build up underneath," she points out. "Mats need to be lifted regularly and the floor properly cleaned and disinfected."

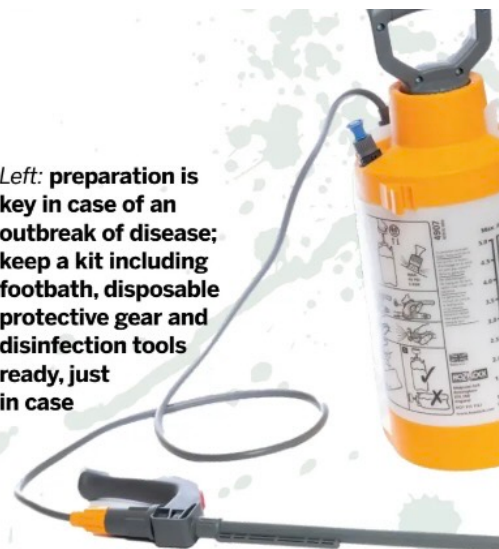
Unfortunately, just sloshing around disinfectant isn't the answer.

"Disinfectant is inactivated by organic material (like faeces and urine) so if you don't





Left: preparation is key in case of an outbreak of disease; keep a kit including footbath, disposable protective gear and disinfection tools ready, just in case



remove that first, you are just making your stable smell pretty.”

She also stresses the importance of correct contact time: “Disinfectant needs time to work – if it’s washed away it won’t be effective.”

Rebecca Bruford, head nurse at the Philip Leverhulme Equine Hospital, agrees that there’s a difference between a stable looking or smelling nice and actually being hygienic.

“Cosmetic cleanliness is important, but it is sensible to focus on risk-based hygiene,” she says. “Areas that could be overlooked can be things like string tied in a stable, so remove string between the turnover of horses, or use tie-up bungees that are washable. Wash food and water bowls with detergent and rinse well. Clean cross-tie clips frequently if that area is communal.”

ANDREA points out that kit which goes out with the horse, travelling to competitions, clinics or camps, might need more frequent washing.

“I don’t think headcollars and cooler blankets get washed enough,” she says. “Sneak them home and put them in your own washing machine! We hot wash at 60°C and then tumble dry. Disinfectant is put in the wash and we never use the same rug twice without washing it.”

That washing machine tip is



“Focus on risk-based hygiene over cosmetic cleanliness”

EQUINE NURSE REBECCA BRUFORD

perhaps best kept secret from a non-horsey other half...

She also says it’s worth being prepared for the worst.

“I know it might seem like overkill, but have a kit ready for an outbreak of a disease like strangles – a footbath, disposable hazmat suits, gloves – if it’s ready to go, then hopefully you never have to use it,” she says.

EVEN these dedicated horse hygienists have jobs they hate. “Poo-picking, I will avoid that at all costs,” admits Jade. “Of course, when they read this, they’ll send me out poo-picking now!”

Luckily, they also have top tips for making dreaded jobs easier.

Daily routine on top yard

JADE ROBERTS outlines the routine at David Doel’s eventing yard:

- All the stables are mucked out every morning. Then they’re skipped out at lunch, afternoon (the slightly dirtier ones are mucked out again) and evening.
- All water buckets and haynets come out before you start to muck out.

“Rubber mats can strain your back,” says Rosina, “We use mole grips [locking pliers], which make moving the mats easier and safer.”

“Get one of those little knapsacks, it doesn’t have to be one of the big Ghostbusters ones!” advises Andrea. “You can get them in the pound shop garden section, they’re so handy, you pop in a bit of disinfectant and you can do your stables, trailer, even take it away with you to a stay-away show.”

But sometimes there’s no substitute for good old-fashioned elbow grease.

“We once bought a bucket washer not too dissimilar to an industrial dishwasher for all our buckets,” remembers Jayne. “However, it turned out it broke more than it was useful, a waste of money. Goes to show you cannot beat manual scrubbing.”

Scientific understanding of bacteria, viruses, how they’re transmitted and the dangers of antimicrobial resistance is increasing all the time. Arming ourselves with the latest knowledge will help us keep our horses safe and reduce the risk of avoidable diseases.

Rosina says we shouldn’t be afraid to ask the experts around us: “If you’d like advice on hygiene and protocols, do speak to your vet or veterinary nurse as they’ll be happy to help you put a simple plan in place, so you can see what good practice looks like and where improvements might be needed.”

And, as Andrea concludes, “The cleaner the environment, the healthier the horse at the end of the day.” **H&H**

● To top up beds, take the bank down and add fresh bedding to the banks. If fresh bedding is laid in the middle of the bed, you’re not rotating the bed. If your fork doesn’t go nicely into the bank, you know it hasn’t been turned.

● I prefer that the loose bits are swept out rather than into the bed. Fresh forage shouldn’t be put on top of the crummy bits, which are part bedding and part seeds from the forage, as it festers and gets moist. That is not good for the horses’ respiratory systems.