

# PRESS RELEASE

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## Biggest response so far for National Equine Health Survey

Leading animal charity The Blue Cross today published the results of its second National Equine Health Survey (NEHS), which was conducted in May 2011. Data was collected from 5500 horses, ponies, donkeys and mules giving a valuable insight into the health of the nation's equines.

The survey, which was first launched by The Blue Cross and BEVA in November 2010, focussed on 28 common disease syndromes including lameness, skin problems, weight issues and respiratory disease.

Over 1,000 people submitted information on the health of their equines - mainly private horse owners but also including equine welfare organisations, riding schools, stud farms and professional yards. The collective data challenges many of the current concepts of disease prevalence in the UK equid population, and for the first time compared data collected from horses and ponies to donkeys and mules.

Josh Slater, Professor of Equine Clinical Studies at The Royal Veterinary College, who has been closely involved in the project and analysed the data for The Blue Cross said: "I am excited to see a consistent pattern forming from survey to survey, which becomes even more significant as more people take part. We are already beginning to get a clear steer on those equine health concerns that may benefit from further research or increased awareness, providing invaluable information for the veterinary profession and wider animal welfare industry."

The key findings from the May survey of horses and ponies are as follows:

- **Skin diseases** such as sweet itch and parasites were the most prevalent syndrome recorded by equine owners (14.3%), overtaking lameness which topped the list in November 2010. This suggests the need to gather more data and raise awareness of skin disease management and prevention.
- **Lameness** was the next most common syndrome reported (11.8%). Although foot lameness is generally perceived to be the most prevalent cause within the veterinary and equine industry, it was recorded less frequently in this survey (4.3%) than lameness due to problems elsewhere (7.4%).
- **Laminitis** was again reported in approximately 3% of horses and ponies - significantly less than the estimates in the veterinary literature, which may over-estimate the prevalence of laminitis at 7%.

- **Weight issues** were in line with the last survey, with between 8 and 10% horses and ponies recorded as being overweight. This is at odds with data from other sources that indicates that the majority of horses and ponies are overweight, but it is based on owners' perceptions of their equine's weight which may require further education.
- **Respiratory diseases** were recorded in 6% of horses and ponies. Allergic respiratory disease (3.2%) was more prevalent than infectious respiratory disease (0.6%), supporting the perceptions in veterinary literature that allergic diseases like Recurrent Airway Obstruction remain the most important in the UK.

While only 840 donkeys and mules were registered in the survey compared to 4,603 horses and ponies, the information differed between the populations in several categories:

- Laminitis prevalence was significantly less in donkeys and mules at 0.7%.
- A greater proportion of donkeys and mules were recorded as having Equine Metabolic Syndrome than horses and ponies (1% v.s 0.5%) emphasising the need for increased awareness of prevention and management of the condition in donkeys as well as in ponies.

Kerry Doyle, education officer at The Blue Cross, who co-ordinate and fund the NEHS, said: "We are so grateful to all those who have participated in the surveys so far, they've produced some really exciting results which offer a unique insight into equine health in this country. We're particularly keen to recruit more professional yards for the next wave, as well as private owners, so please remember to take part in November."

The National Equine Health Survey is conducted twice-yearly with the next wave planned for **14 to 20 November 2011**. All keepers and owners of equines are urged to participate and their details will remain anonymous. It's very quick and easy to complete and should only take around five minutes.

All participants have the chance to win a free photoshoot with their horse which will be used to promote the next wave of the survey, along with a beautiful horseshoe necklace.

To view the latest results and register online for the next survey, visit [www.bluecross.org.uk/NEHS](http://www.bluecross.org.uk/NEHS) or email [NEHS@bluecross.org.uk](mailto:NEHS@bluecross.org.uk). People who registered to take part in May will receive an email with the full results and an invitation to take part in November.