

**Health care and disease prevalence in British horses, 2009-2011**

*Ireland, J.<sup>1</sup>, Wylie, C.<sup>1</sup>, Collins, S.<sup>2</sup>, Verheyen, K.<sup>3</sup> and Newton, R.<sup>1</sup>, <sup>1</sup>Animal Health Trust, United Kingdom, <sup>2</sup>School of Veterinary Science, Queensland, Australia, <sup>3</sup>Royal Veterinary College, United Kingdom; jo.ireland@aht.org.uk*

Equine preventive health care is intended to reduce disease and improve welfare but owners may fail to employ adequate preventive measures. Knowledge of common diseases in the general equine population is important in evaluation of risk factors for these diseases. This study aimed to describe preventive health care and owner-reported disease prevalence in British horses and ponies. A cross-sectional survey collected data via postal questionnaire from a random sample of veterinary-registered horse owners in Britain (n=797). The majority of animals received regular preventive health care: 96% received farrier visits at regular intervals; median time since last anthelmintic administration was 8.7 weeks and only 8% were unvaccinated, although fewer ponies were vaccinated compared to horses (P=0.008). Animals >25 years old received less frequent hoof care and lower proportions of retired animals were shod or vaccinated. Thirty-one percent of animals were overweight; a greater proportion of ponies were overweight compared to horses. In the previous 7 days, lameness affected 11% of animals and 7% developed a new health problem, of which 59% were veterinary-diagnosed. The most prevalent conditions were musculoskeletal (2%), skin (2%) and respiratory disorders (1%). Thirty-one percent had a long-term/recurrent condition, of which osteoarthritis (14%), sweet itch (8%) and recurrent airway obstruction (6%) were the most prevalent. Fifteen percent had a history of laminitis, of which 46% had suffered more than one episode. Greater proportions of animals with a history of laminitis and of recurrent cases were ponies (P<0.001). There was evidence of reduced provision health care in retired animals and in ponies compared to horses. Description of the most prevalent conditions affecting British veterinary-registered horses/ponies will aid improvements in their health care and inform future research to identify risk factors for disease.