

To : ALL LICENSED RACETRACKS AND HORSEMEN ORGANIZATIONS
From : Robert Williams, Executive Director
Date : April 2, 2020
Re : Continuing Operations Discussion

Background

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo has issued several Executive Orders designed to combat the Novel Coronavirus [COVID-19] outbreak. Among the Orders is a requirement that certain employers reduce the number of their employees working at individual locations in the State by 100 percent effective March 22, 2020, which has since been extended through April 15, 2020. While the employment reduction requirements apply to all for-profit and not-for-profit employers in New York State, animal care (not racing) operations have been deemed essential and are exempt. For purposes of the Executive Orders, animal care operations include equine barn or facility maintenance, equine turnout and exercise, stall cleaning and enclosure repair, and farrier and veterinary care.

Whether a racetrack remains open for training and barns remain open for stabling is a determination to be made by each racetrack and its horsemen's organization. However, should a racetrack or barn area remain open there are certain standards that must be maintained.

Commission staff recently visited each licensed racetrack to review the procedures and processes that have been imposed during this extraordinary time. While we were pleased to find basic health and safety precautions being followed, it is appropriate to underscore best practices.

Resources

We need to remain mindful that we remain under a public health crisis and pandemic situation. Accordingly, the health and safety precautions advised by the State Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control should be diligently followed.

The following websites provide credible guidance regarding Novel Coronavirus practice and overall community safety measures. We strongly recommend these sites be regularly accessed and materials thereon reviewed.

<https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/home>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

The National Thoroughbred Racing Association and the U.S. Trotting Association both maintain webpages dedicated to dissemination of Novel Coronavirus-related information. Those pages may be accessed at the links below:

<https://www.ntra.com/covid-19>

<http://ustrottingnews.com/us-covid-19-resource-center>

Distancing and Cleaning

All facilities that remain open must practice social distancing, and proper cleaning and sanitizing, in accordance with the guidelines and recommendations provided within the aforementioned websites. We also strongly encourage each facility to post signage – in English and Spanish – detailing handwashing procedures and social distancing protocols in prominent locations. Focused cleaning efforts should be targeted on door and stall handles, railings, flat door handles, shared practice equipment and other frequently touched surfaces.

Racetrack Access

There must be tightly controlled access to racetracks or barn areas that remain open, with the racetrack and backstretch areas closed to all non-essential personnel. Only certain licensed racetrack employees, trainers, veterinarians, farriers and stable workers should be afforded access. No visitation by owners, friends or family should be permitted. This control starts with upgraded security controls and procedures that underscore and enable limiting gate access.

Operational Concerns

For facilities that remain open for training purposes, it is management's responsibility to maintain the training surface in a safe condition. Failure to properly maintain the surface presents significant risk to the equine athlete and those engaged in exercising or training. Racetracks must not allow, by omission, any unnecessary risk relative to its racing surfaces.

With respect to sanitary conditions, should any animals be maintained on racetrack grounds, the racetrack must continue to meet basic welfare responsibilities. These responsibilities include securing a reliable supply of products necessary to maintain the population and ensuring that the sanitary needs of the facility remain satisfied. These needs include the scheduled removal and disposition of refuse, manure and stained straw.

Dormitory Concerns

For those facilities with dormitories, there needs to be a vigilant monitoring of dormitory areas, with required regular daily visitation by assigned personnel to provide support and screening of those domiciled. Designated quarantine rooms should be set aside for the sole purpose of providing residents a safe area to be quarantined, if required. A security plan should be detailed to ensure these quarantine rooms are kept fully secured and the basic needs of individuals under quarantine are met.

The sanitation concerns of these facilities must remain in a state of address. This includes timely rubbish removal and, during this public health crisis, increased cleaning and sanitizing of common areas and restrooms.

Health of the Equine Athlete and their Caregivers

Finally, we recognize that this public health crisis and pandemic situation has gravely stressed many racetracks and racing stable operations. As there is no pari-mutuel racing activity, the ability to generate revenue that supports the care and comfort of the equine athlete and those that tend to the animals have been functionally eliminated. Regardless, costs associated with operations such as employee salaries, veterinary care, feed and bedding remain.

We understand the difficulty imposed to ensure these services are available, but it is simply unacceptable not to accommodate the needs of horses and workers. While the Commission has no financial resources to directly assist, we might be able to provide guidance and direction. COVID-19 is a public health disaster. Let's all work together when necessary to prevent individual disasters and get into the best position to resume racing when that opportunity occurs.

My senior staff and I are always available to discuss issues of concern. Please don't hesitate to make contact if you think we can assist.