Horse passports

In the guide

Definition of a horse
Why does my horse need a passport?
What's in the passport & how do I get one?
Can I keep a horse without a passport?
Passports for foals
Microchips
Diagram of the horse: the 'silhouette'
Smartcard
When must the passport accompany a horse?
What if I buy or sell a horse?
What do I do if my horse dies?
What should I do if the passport is lost or damaged?
Veterinary treatment
Wild or semi-wild horses on Dartmoor, Exmoor & the New Forest
Imported horses
Enforcement
Main requirements
Further information
Penalties
Key legislation

This guidance is for England

All horse owners must have an identity document or passport (both generally referred to as a 'passport') for their horse.

Horses born since 1 October 2018 need to be microchipped with a unique number; an application needs to be made for a passport within six months of birth or by 30 November of the calendar year in which it was born, whichever is later.

Horses born between 1 July 2009 and 30 September 2018 need to be microchipped with a unique number that is matched to the owner's contact details, and a passport.

Horses born on or before 30 June 2009 have until 1 October 2020 to be microchipped and a passport document applied for. This will bring older horses into line with the current requirements.
A horse cannot be sold without a passport (veterinary or breed certificates are not sufficient) although there are a few exceptions. When a horse is sold, the seller must give the passport to the buyer at the time of the sale and the buyer must register the new ownership within 30 days. If a horse dies or is slaughtered, the keeper must return the passport to the issuing body (IB) - also known as a passport-issuing organisation (PIO) - within 30 days of the animal's death.

Horse owners can log in to the 'ChipChecker' at the Equine Register, enter their horse's microchip number and check that the centrally registered information about their horse is correct and up to date. If anything is incorrect, you should contact the IB / PIO to rectify.

Definition of a horse

In EU Regulation (EU) 2015/262 laying down rules pursuant to Directives 90/427/EEC and 2009/156/EC as regards the methods for the identification of equidae (Equine Passport Regulation) 'equidae' or 'equine animal(s)' are defined as "wild or domesticated soliped mammals of all species within the genus Equus of the family Equidae, and their crosses" - for example, horse, donkey, mule, hinny (jennet), zebra, Przewalski, or their crosses.

Why does my horse need a passport?

Horse passports are required by European law and are necessary in order to prevent horses that have been treated with certain veterinary medicines (such as wormers and analgesics) from entering the human food chain. Although we do not consume horse meat in any great quantity in the UK, a large number of horses are slaughtered in Britain each year for export for human consumption.

Passports will also help reduce the risk of a ban being introduced on up to 75% of veterinary medicines (including phenylbutazone, also known as 'Bute') currently used to treat horses.

Ensuring your horse passport, microchip and registered information on the Central Equine Database is up to date will also allow lost, stolen or straying horses to be quickly reunited with their owners. It reduces the likelihood of theft and illegal sale and prevents horses being slaughtered if they are signed out of the food chain. Additionally the Central Equine Database can be used to identify horses and owners during a disease outbreak and gives a clear picture of England's horse population.

What's in the passport & how do I get one?

A passport is a booklet (minimum A5 size), written in both English and French, that uniquely identifies a horse throughout its life and has been issued by a recognised IB / PIO. The passport details the horse's identity, including its unique life number and microchip number this information will be laminated to prevent alteration. The later pages show the veterinary treatment history of the horse, its movement and ownership history, and a declaration as to whether or not the horse is intended for human consumption.

Applications for passports must be made by the owner of the horse (or the owner's appointed agent) in writing to a IB / PIO and be in the format specified by that IB / PIO.

A list of IBs / PIOs is available on the GOV.UK website.
Can I keep a horse without a passport?

The owner or keeper with primary responsibility for any horse must ensure it has a passport issued by an IB / PIO. As well as getting a passport, a horse will need to be microchipped. If your horse was born on or before 30 June 2009, you have until 1 October 2020 to have the horse microchipped and the passport issued.

Most horses over six months old should already have an passport. However, where a horse has not previously been issued with a passport it will need to be microchipped before the passport can be applied for. Where the passport has not been applied for within the required time limits, the animal will automatically be signed out of the human food chain.

The owner of a horse must obtain an passport for it on or before 30 November of the year of its birth or by six months after its birth, whichever is the later. Only the owner of the horse can apply for a passport.

A horse cannot be sold without an passport (veterinary or breed certificates are not sufficient).

Passports for foals

Foals need to be microchipped with a unique number that is matched to the owner's contact details, as well as getting a passport. This must be done before the foal is six months old or by 30 November in the year it is born, whichever is later. However, foals will need to be microchipped and get a passport earlier if they are to be sold before this time limit has elapsed.

Foals without a passport may be moved with their dam / foster mare for production purposes - for example, to and from a stud; they may also be sold without a passport providing they remain with their dam. Owners should note that some auctioneers may require all horses to have a valid passport for sale at auction.

Microchips

Microchips, which are also known as transponders, are read-only passive radio frequency identification devices that are implanted into a horse's body and have an identification number unique to that particular animal. Only a registered veterinary surgeon of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons can implant the device. A vet must undertake procedures to detect any previous devices already fitted to a horse before beginning to implant a microchip.

Diagram of the horse: the 'silhouette'

The diagram of the horse (silhouette) is not compulsory in passports because horses are microchipped to confirm their identity. However, if your horse is registered with a breed society, its rules may state that you still need a silhouette or a similar record of identification marks. This does not replace the requirement for a microchip.

Smartcard

A smartcard is a plastic device with an embedded computer chip capable of storing data that can be read by compatible computer systems. The devices can be authorised for use in Member States of the European Union (EU) to accompany the horse instead of the passport, allowing equines to move within agreed European national boundaries. The smartcard must be issued by the same IB / PIO that issued the paper passport and must be approved by Defra for use in the UK. They can be used to accompany the horse rather
than the actual passport for movements into and within England.

**When must the passport accompany a horse?**

The passport (or smartcard) must accompany a horse at all times. The person with primary responsibility for the horse must have the passport made available to them if they are not the owner. The exceptions to this are:

- emergency situations
- when a horse is being grazed or stabled but the passport can be produced without delay in the event of an inspection
- when a horse is being moved on foot, where the passport can be viewed without delay
- when a horse is being used for competition or an event and is required to leave the venue

**What if I buy or sell a horse?**

When a horse is sold the owner must give the passport to the buyer at the time of the sale (sale includes any transfer of ownership, whether or not any money changes hands). In the case of auction sales, the passport must be given to the auctioneers, who must then give it to the buyer. The buyer must notify the issuing IB / PIO (the IB / PIO may be based in another EU Member State) to register the new ownership within 30 days, and include:

- the buyer's name and address
- the identification of the horse

There is no exemption for dealers that sell a horse within 30 days of purchasing it.

**Note:** it is advisable to thoroughly check a passport before purchasing a horse, and in particular check that the date of birth has not been altered.

**What do I do if my horse dies?**

When a horse dies, the keeper must return the passport to the IB / PIO within 30 days of the animal's death, but can request that it is sent back once the procedure of logging the death and cancelling the passport has been completed.

When a horse is sold to a slaughterhouse, the occupier of the slaughterhouse will give the passport to the official veterinary surgeon.

**What should I do if the passport is lost or damaged?**

Where a passport has been lost but the horse's identity can be established and an ownership declaration is available, any person may apply for a replacement passport for that horse to the IB / PIO, if known. Where the original IB / PIO is not known, and there is no microchip that can be traced, the owner should apply to any IB / PIO.
**Veterinary treatment**

Article 37 of EU Regulation (EU) 2015/262 states: "An equine animal shall be deemed to be intended for slaughter for human consumption except where it is, in accordance with this Regulation, irreversibly declared as not so intended in Part II of Section II of the identification document by ..." the signature of (a) the owner at their own discretion, or (b) the keeper and veterinarian responsible (for administering veterinary medicine); or where applicable the IB / PIO issuing a duplicate or replacement identification document in accordance with the relevant articles.

The passport needs to be available at the time of treatment with a veterinary medicine. If the horse is not already signed out of the food chain and the veterinary medicine to be administered will require it, the vet is obliged to ensure this is done in part II of section II. The vet may also need to 'invalidate' part III of section II of the passport.

The substances that should not be administered, supplied or prescribed to a food-producing animal are:

- any product that contains an active substance not contained within table 1 (the 'allowed list') of EU Regulation (EU) No 37/2010 on pharmacologically active substances and their classification regarding maximum residue limits in foodstuffs of animal origin or on the list of essential substances (such as phenylbutazone) will automatically mean that the horse must be permanently excluded from the food chain
- medicines containing substances included on the ‘prohibited substances’ list

If any of these substances are administered the horse can **never** be slaughtered for human consumption and the declaration in section II of the horse passport must be signed by the veterinarian or the owner as 'Not intended for human consumption'. Your vet will be able to advise you further regarding the above products and medicines.

You are advised to think carefully before deciding whether you wish to voluntarily sign your horse out of the human food chain.

A 'not intended' declaration at part II of section II of the passport cannot be reversed and a horse may not be consigned for slaughter for human consumption if this section has been signed.

If unplanned or emergency veterinary treatment is required and the passport is not available, the vet will not know whether your horse is signed out of the food chain and will therefore be permitted to administer only substances suitable for food-producing animals. The vet is required to record all vaccinations a horse receives in sections VII and VIII of the horse passport.

The vet is also required to enter the date of the last administration, as prescribed, of that medicinal product in section II of the passport. The animal so treated can be slaughtered for human consumption only after the end of the general withdrawal period of six months following the date of the last administration.

**Wild or semi-wild horses on Dartmoor, Exmoor & the New Forest**

Wild or semi-wild horses identified in the lists kept by the Dartmoor Commoners Council, the stud book of the Exmoor Pony Society, the lists kept by Verderers of the New Forest, the stud book of the New Forest Pony Breeding and Cattle Society, or identified in the lists kept by the National Trust as Konik equines located at Wicken Fen, are exempt from the requirement for horse passports until such time as they leave those respective areas, or are brought into domestic use. This exemption applies to those animals so listed and contained within the designated areas. All other horses in those areas are required to have horse passports.
Imported horses

A horse may be moved within the EU only if it is accompanied by a passport (with a few exceptions). Horses entering the EU from a third country with an identification document may be considered valid if they comply with set conditions. The owner of any horse entering England from outside the EU without a horse passport issued by an IB / PIO must apply for a horse passport within 30 days of entering the country. Until the passport is issued, no change of ownership may take place.

The horse will need to be identified in accordance with EU rules and will require a microchip when being issued with a passport. If the horse has an existing microchip detected, it may be possible to use this identification and update the existing passport. Any passport so issued must state that the horse is not intended for human consumption.

Enforcement

Authorised officers of the Secretary of State or the local authority have the power to enter premises (and vehicles) and inspect horse passports and other documents at any reasonable time.

Main requirements

The Regulations require that you must:

- not sell a horse without giving its passport to the buyer at the time of sale (sell includes any transfer of ownership, whether or not any money changes hands)
- notify a new ownership to the IB / PIO within 30 days and include the buyer's name and address and the identification of the horse
- obtain a passport within certain time limits
- not apply for a duplicate or replacement passport except in certain circumstances
- not fail to update a passport in the case of an imported horse
- when implanting a microchip into a horse, not fail to follow procedures to detect previous active marking (veterinary surgeons only)
- not have anyone other than a veterinary surgeon insert a microchip
- not move a horse without its passport (exemptions apply)
- return the passport to the IB / PIO within 30 days of a death of a horse
- not fail to record veterinary medicinal treatment in a passport and check the human consumption status in the passport prior to treatment (veterinary surgeons only)
- not destroy or deface a passport
- not alter an entry in a passport
- not make a forged passport or be in possession of one
- not fail to produce a passport to an inspector when requested to do so
- not obstruct an inspector

Further information

More comprehensive information on horse passports can be found on the GOV.UK website.

Penalties

Failure to comply with trading standards law can lead to enforcement action and to sanctions, which may include a fine and/or imprisonment. For more information please see Trading standards: powers,
Key legislation

EU Regulation (EU) No 37/2010 on pharmacologically active substances and their classification regarding maximum residue limits in foodstuffs of animal origin
EU Regulation (EU) 2015/262 laying down rules pursuant to Directives 90/427/EEC and 2009/156/EC as regards the methods for the identification of equidae (Equine Passport Regulation)
Equine Identification (England) Regulations 2018

Last reviewed / updated: October 2018

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links may only show the original version of the legislation, although some amending legislation is linked to separately where it is directly related to the content of a guide. Information on amendments to UK legislation can be found on each link's 'More Resources' tab; amendments to EU legislation are usually incorporated into the text.

This site contains impartial free information, and is Government-backed.

The content on Business Companion is written and verified by expert contributors, but is not designed to be a replacement for professional advice and is intended only for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

Though not marked as relevant for Northern Ireland, the advice and guidance that applies to England can be taken to reflect the 'spirit' of the law in NI, but should not be relied upon without professional advice.

If you are in any doubt about your legal responsibilities with regard to the topics on this site and would like more guidance, start by getting in touch with your local trading standards service; you can find their contact details by using the search tool on the Chartered Trading Standards Institute website.

We store cookies on your computer to help us improve this website. If you proceed, we'll assume you're happy with this; otherwise, you can change your cookie settings at any time.

© 2019 Chartered Trading Standards Institute