

Alert | Equine Industry Group



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The Shows Will Go On, But Safely: Updates to US Equestrian's COVID-19 Action Plan

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has affected virtually every industry, profession, and community around the world. Equestrian athletes largely have been unable to compete, train, or effectively do their jobs in the same way as those able to work remotely. Premier events and championships have been cancelled or postponed, including the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics, now scheduled for 2021. In addition, many equestrians have businesses to run, horses to care for, and staff to support. Without events, clinics, and related outlets for competition and training, many riders, trainers, and owners have had to revisit their objectives and goals for the year; and find alternative ways to safeguard their businesses.

Effective March 16, 2020, United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) suspended all USEF-owned events, selection trials, training camps, clinics, and activities for 30 days due to the pandemic. For USEF-licensed competitions that elected to run during the 30-day period, USEF announced that there would be “no accumulation of points, scores, money won, qualifications, or rankings toward any USEF awards programs, USEF owned event, or selection to a US team.” The suspension was extended through May 31, and competition in USEF-owned events officially re-opened on June 1. While many events and championships have been canceled, USEF approved over 100 rule modifications to assist competition organizers with rescheduling events. Competition protocols were also put in place to help make the competitions for competitors, organizers, officials, and spectators alike.

The rule changes and competition safety protocols are accessible on USEF's website, www.usef.org, which contains important information and resources for competition organizers and competitors, including the most recent versions of resources entitled "COVID-19 Emergency Response Plan," "COVID-19 Update From USEF Recognized Affiliates," "Update to COVID-19 Competition Action Plan for USEF-Licensed Competitions," "State-by-State Tracker of COVID-19 Restrictions and Regulations," "CEO Update on the Use of Face Masks/Coverings and Pandemic-Related Requirements," "Update to COVID-19 Competition Action Plan for USEF-Licensed Competitions," and "Licensed Competitions COVID-19 Toolkit for Competition Organizers and Participants." Also available on the website are a series of on-demand webinars to provide event organizers and participants with a plan to safely return to competition.

One of the user-friendly features of the COVID-19 Toolkit for USEF-Licensed Competitions is the FAQ webpage, which contains FAQ links for "Common FAQs," "Competition Organizer FAQs," and "Licensed Officials FAQs." Responses can be brought up by clicking the down arrow next to the number of each question. A sample FAQ for each category is shown below:

Common: Is social distancing required in all areas of the competition grounds?

Competition Organizer: What should be included in an Emergency Response Plan specific to a COVID-19 incident or outbreak?

Licensed Officials: If I officiate in a state where I must quarantine after entering the state, what should I do?

Whether the competition is in the Jumper, Dressage, Eventing, or Hunter disciplines, equestrian events promote a family-style atmosphere, and show organizers encourage family and friends of the participants to attend. However, these are not normal times, and another question on the minds of many equestrians is: "Can family members or my children join me at competitions?" USEF's website provides the following response:

USEF strongly discourages participants from bringing additional family members who are not essential to providing care to the participant or their horse. Each participant must acknowledge and exercise personal responsibility while attending a competition to minimize risk for themselves and those around them." Ensuring the safety of horses, participants, and all stakeholders at USEF competitions should be a priority; and we encourage all equestrians to familiarize themselves with the safety resources available on USEF's website.

USEF has been able to keep 38 essential facilities worldwide running without interruption amid the COVID-19 crisis. With the lifting of the March 16 suspension and equestrians returning to competition, USEF CEO Murry Kessler shared the following basic safety tips in a May 12 letter to the membership:

1. If you are uncomfortable and feel the risk is too high – Don't show!
2. If you are a high-risk individual – Don't show!
3. If you have any symptoms at all (flu, fever, allergy, cough, etc...) – Don't show!
4. If you become aware that you have come in "unprotected" contact with someone who has tested positive – Don't show for 14 days!

5. If you test positive, do not return to showing until your symptoms are gone for 14 days and you have been cleared by your health provider, and notify anyone you have been in contact with, so they don't show for 14 days.
6. If none of the above applies, go show, but strictly follow the protocols established by USEF, federal, state and county law, and other Competition Organizer requirements. For example, whenever you are on the grounds of a competition, you will need to wear a mask unless you are up on horseback. You will need to maintain social distancing. Additionally, you should continue to frequently wash your hands and use hand sanitizer.

The requirements and recommendations in USEF's COVID-19 action plans are intended to ensure that event organizers and participants follow the most recent guidance from federal, state, and other public health officials. As the equestrian community navigates the "new normal" at USEF competitions and events, USEF's guidance may evolve and change, with the content of the action plans to reflect those changes.

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