Equine Veterinary Surveillance Network

EVSNET Practice information handbook

EVSNET is funded by

The Horse Trust

Advancing Excellence in Equine Care

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

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1) What is EVSNET?

EVSNET stands for the Equine Veterinary Surveillance Network.

EVSNET collects large volumes of information from horses that require vet attention from veterinary practices like this one, as well as from diagnostic laboratories receiving samples for testing from vets. By working together, they are helping researchers better understand diseases in horses.

This national project started in 2020 and aims to help the horse, owner and veterinarian through research in priority areas in equine health and welfare.

EVSNET's key aims are to:

- Monitor **disease trends** over time and highlight appropriate interventions
- Identify populations at risk and monitor **treatments and outcomes**
- Provide **data resources** for those working in horse health and welfare research
- Improve general **public awareness** of equine diseases and prevention
- Provide a route to **clinical benchmarking** for vets in equine practice

This veterinary practice has recognised the importance of supporting veterinary research and has joined EVSNET.

This means that owners visiting this practice have the opportunity to get involved by contributing information about their visit.

2) What information does EVSNET collect? Routine information

The following routine information is sent to EVSNET automatically without the need for the veterinary surgeon to input additional data.

- Species (e.g, horse, donkey)
- Breed
- Date/year of birth
- Sex and castration status
- Microchip number
- Weight (weigh bridge, weight tape or estimated)/ body condition score
- Vaccination history
- The nature of the condition as described in the free text notes during your horse's treatment
- Any items purchased, treatments given and drugs prescribed
- Insurance status
- The stables/ owner postcode, which is only used internally for disease mapping purposes, and never published
- The unique anonymised identification numbers assigned to just you and your horse

EVSNET does not routinely collect names of veterinary staff, owners or horses, house numbers, street names or towns; nor do they collect any financial information including the cost of treatment or how owners pay for their horse's consultation.

Occasionally a vet may write names, addresses or phone numbers in the consultation notes - these are removed by EVSNET using a sophisticated deidentification tool and are never used for research.

3) Why is it important for me to take part?

Without the support of horse owners like you and practices like this, this project would not be possible. By participating in EVSNET, owners and veterinary practices across the UK are giving researchers the information they need to help improve the health and welfare of horses.

4) How does EVSNET help improve the health of the UK horse population?

The information collected by EVSNET builds a picture of diseases experienced by horses and where they appear in the country.

This can also help us understand disease patterns and improve advice for management and treatment. For example, is it their age, or their breed, or perhaps where in the country they live that might contribute to why a particular horse is affected by a certain disease?

Using the information collected, EVSNET and EVSNET-approved researchers:

- Produce outputs that will help horse owners and their vets better understand, prevent and control a range of diseases
- Identify new diseases early in their development
- Inform vets of diseases that are of particular concern in their local area

5) Can I be identified from the information collected?

EVSNET does not request the names of owners and horses, postal addresses, the names of vets or any financial/ insurance policy information. EVSNET only routinely collects the full postcode of which is important to identify the location of where disease is occurring in the UK. This full postcode will only be available to EVSNET and EVSNET-approved researchers and will never be published in any form.

For the vast majority of stables, the postcode is not unique, so individual location cannot be identified. However, in rare cases, there may be some postcodes with only one residence. Therefore, to further protect privacy, any publications from EVSNET will not use the full postcode. Instead, EVSNET will only indicate where diseases are occurring at a lower resolution such as the first half of the postcode. For example, EVSNET's postcode is CH64 7TE, but we might only present it as being in the CH64 area. By not publishing at the level of the full postcode, it will never be possible for others to identify who has contributed to EVSNET.

EVSNET also collects the free text consultation notes. These are used by your vet to describe the reason for the horses requiring a visit, as well as any diagnoses and treatments given, and are extremely valuable to our research. Occasionally, identifiers like owner's and vet's names, phone numbers and addresses are also written in this free text (for example 'please phone Mrs Jones on 0123 456789'). EVSNET have therefore developed sophisticated software tools to automatically remove most of these parts of more personal information (this process is called 'deidentification'). Although this cannot be 100% accurate for example due to the variety of new horse names or telephone number formats, the deidentification tool is regularly updated as and when identifiers are located in the text. The small number that may remain will never be used in publications using EVSNET data.

Some breeds are considered 'rare', and owners of such breeds may be concerned about being identified. To address this, EVSNET make all reasonable efforts when producing reports, to lower the reporting resolution for rare breeds, such that they cannot be identified.

6) EVSNET and Data Protection

EVSNET complies with the Data Protection Act 2018. Owners and practitioners can request to see their data, and have it removed. The 'lawful basis' for the processing of data by EVSNET is 'legitimate interest'. There is no other reasonable way to do what EVSNET are doing, and the outputs are for the benefit of owners and their horses.

7) How is the information collected by EVSNET stored?

The University processes personal data as part of its research and teaching activities in accordance with the lawful basis of 'public task', and in accordance with the University's purpose of advancing education, learning and research for the public benefit.

Under UK data protection legislation, the University acts as the Data Controller for personal data collected as part of the University's research. Any queries relating to the handling of your personal data can be sent to EVSNET (contact information is provided at the end of the handbook).

EVSNET has a responsibility under the Data Protection Act 2018 to protect information about the veterinary surgeon, the owner and horse. This is an important requirement of our ethical approval.

Data is encrypted in transit using secure http i.e. https. Once the data has been received at University of Liverpool it is stored in an SQL server database on secure servers managed by the University's Computer Services Department. Databases are behind the University of Liverpool firewall and can only be accessed internally by authorised users. In addition, to maintain a high level of security, information in its raw form is not allowed to be saved onto other portable devices such as laptop computers, portable external hard-drives or USB pens, unless it is encrypted. EVSNET will store the data for a minimum of 10 years.

8) What do I have to do if I want to take part?

This veterinary practice has already decided to be part of EVSNET, supporting important work being done to help improve horse health and welfare. Horse owners attending this practice and who are happy to be involved in EVSNET do not have to do anything new. Information will be collected automatically through the computer system by the veterinary surgeon while writing the clinical notes and interacting with the EVSNET software.

9) What if I do not wish to take part?

Although the veterinary practice has decided to take part in EVSNET there is no obligation for the owners to take part in EVSNET. If you do not wish to take part, please let your veterinary surgeon know before the end of the vet visit. All of the information relating to their consultation will be excluded from the project. Opting out of EVSNET will have no impact on the care individual horse in this veterinary practice. Owners can request for data to be removed from EVSNET retrospectively by completing an opt-out form on the EVSNET webpage (www.liverpool.ac.uk/evsnet/removing-your-horse's-data).

Veterinary practice staff can also complete this form on an owner's behalf when requested. All requests to remove data will be actioned, unless data has been included in an active research dataset or already published, in which case the data will be used for no further research.

10) How will the information be presented?

Information collected by EVSNET is deidentified and analysed by EVSNET and EVSNET-approved researchers. These researchers prepare scientific papers for the veterinary profession and wider scientific community, and also communicate findings to the general public through the social media pages (Facebook and Twitter - @evsnet) as well as other media where appropriate.

Some of the research completed using EVSNET will also be used to generate income which is used to support the longevity of the project, thereby helping to ensure horses can continue to benefit from this research for as long as possible.
You can see examples of this research through the EVSNET website: www.liverpool.ac.uk/evsnet/

11) How can information be seen?

The University processes personal data as part of its research and teaching activities in accordance with the lawful basis of 'public task', and in accordance with the University's purpose of advancing education, learning and research for the public benefit.

Everybody will be able to see anonymised summaries and open access publications of the information we collect on the EVSNET website: www.liverpool.ac.uk/evsnet/. These include charts and graphs that allow you to see what is happening in the UK. Individual veterinary practices, staff, owners and horses will never be identifiable. EVSNET will develop these outputs over time into a comprehensive picture of horse diseases across the UK.

Veterinary practices will be given access to a personalised online secure site called the EVSNET portal which allows them to explore the information they have provided to EVSNET. This helps veterinary surgeons and nurses better understand the diseases seen in their practice and how they can help their horses and owners. For example, a key feature of the EVSNET portal will allow veterinary practices to compare, or benchmark, their antibiotic use; responsible use of antibiotics is an important issue in both veterinary and human medicine.

12) Who will have access to the data EVSNET collects?

Researchers in the core EVSNET team based at University of Liverpool may sometimes need to use the raw data as collected for example, when responding to suspect disease outbreaks and time is of the essence. All other researchers can apply to gain access to the deidentified data only, which involves being bound by the terms of a Data User Agreement to protect the use of the data. All published data will be in summary form and anonymised. All
data access is through secure login and / or encrypted data transfer.

All researchers wishing to use EVSNET data for their research, regardless of their affiliation, need to apply to the EVSNET Data Access and Publication Panel (DAPP). This is a review process assessing the nature of the research to be done and identifying whether the findings would be beneficial to the veterinary profession, horses and their owners. This is an important consideration of our ethical approval granted by the University of Liverpool. The DAPP also ensures that individuals can not be identified from any publication.

13) How is EVSNET funded?

The Horse Trust
Advancing Excellence in Equine Care

EVSNET is currently funded through a Horse Trust research grant.

In the future some of the work completed by EVSNET may be used to generate income for example with pharmaceutical companies who might want to better understand how their products are being used by vets in practice. These data are provided as anonymised summary reports - companies are never sent raw data or free text fields, even in their deidentified form. An updated list of our funders can be seen on our website. All income, regardless of its source, is used to support the longevity of the project, so that the veterinary profession and horses can continue to benefit for as long as possible.

Veterinary practices will be given access to a personalised online secure site called the EVSNET portal which allows them to explore the information they have provided to EVSNET. This helps veterinary surgeons and nurses better understand the diseases seen in their practice and how they can help their horses and owners. For example, a key feature of the EVSNET portal will allow veterinary practices to compare, or benchmark, their antibiotic use; responsible use of antibiotics is an important issue in both veterinary and human medicine.

14) Who manages EVSNET?

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

EVSNET is managed by academics and researchers based at the University of Liverpool.

15) Has data collection been approved?

Yes. EVSNET has ethical approval from the University of Liverpool, which is routinely reviewed every three years. Through our ethical approval, EVSNET has a duty to protect the information collected under the Data Protection Act 2018.

Benchmarking and clinical data research provides a tangible benefit to UK veterinary practice.

In recognition of this, the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme awards points to practices that contribute clinical data to EVSNET.

We hope this gives all concerned, including participating veterinary surgeons, nurses and owners, the necessary confidence to take part in EVSNET.

16) What do I do if I want to complain?

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let EVSNET know by contacting. Please contact us at the EVSNET office and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the Research Ethics and Integrity Office at ethics@liv.ac.uk. When contacting the Research Ethics and Integrity Office, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

The ethical approval reference number for EVSNET is RETH001080.

The University strives to maintain the highest standards of rigour in the processing of your data. However, if you have any concerns about the way in which the University processes your personal data, it is important that you are aware of your right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office by calling 0303 123 1113.

17) How can I find out more about EVSNET?

Visit our website for more information about the work we do:
www.liverpool.ac.uk/evsnet/
You can also download an electronic copy of this booklet here too.

You can contact us by:
Telephoning us: 0151 795 6080
Emailing us: evsnet@liverpool.ac.uk
Writing to us: EVSNET, University of Liverpool, Leahurst Campus, Chester High Road, Neston, Cheshire CH64 7TE
Following us on Facebook: @evsnet
Following us on Twitter: @evsnet

Thanks for taking the time to read this booklet and finding out more about EVSNET.

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