

GUIDE TO THE HORSE PASSPORT LAW

The information below is not an exhaustive guide to the law and has no legal standing. In case of doubt, please refer to the Equine Identification Regulations 2018 which can be downloaded from our website. The term equine refers to all horses, ponies, donkeys, mules and zebras.

Background: Horse passports became law in the UK in 2005 and are only issued by approved Passport Issuing Organisations (PIOs). The passport is a food chain document that identifies the equine by its microchip and silhouette (markings) and provides information of the food status of the animal. If Section II (Section IX in older passports), part II is not signed the equine is deemed eligible to be slaughtered for human consumption and this determines which medicines can be administered. Once Section II is signed the animal is permanently excluded from the food chain and the owner has a legal responsibility to update the passport issuer. Your equines food status must be kept up to date and can be checked at <https://www.equineregister.co.uk/>.

Applying For A Passport: By law, a passport application must be received by a Passport Issuer within six months of birth or by 30th November of the year of birth – whichever date is latest. If a passport is issued later than 12 months after birth, or if the country of foaling is unknown, it will be stamped as “Replacement” which then permanently excludes it from entering the food chain. If a passport is lost the law requires the owner to apply for a Duplicate Passport. If the original passport issuer cannot be identified a passport stamped as Replacement will be issued. Duplicate and Replacement passports permanently exclude the equine from entering the food chain.

Buying & Selling An Equine: It is illegal to sell an equine without handing over the passport at the time of sale so if no passport is available the seller must obtain one before the sale goes ahead. Once you have bought, or been given, an equine you have 30 days to register your ownership. If you wish to sell the animal within those 30 days you must register your ownership first.

Advice: Always ensure you inspect the passport when viewing an equine and make sure it matches the animal you are viewing/buying. The passport is evidence of the equines identity but not proof of ownership and so buyers are advised to get a receipt from the seller to include a minimum of the Life Number from the passport, the seller and buyers name and address with the amount and date paid. If an ownership dispute arises later you will need to seek legal advice as the Horse Passport Agency Ltd cannot get involved in such disputes.

Microchipping: It is now a legal requirement that all equines in Great Britain are microchipped. Those details must be registered with the Passport Issuing Organisation who will then update the Central Equine Database. All passports issued after July 2009 should already be linked to a microchip so this law applies to older passports. If your horse does not have a microchip linked to the passport then contact the Passport Issuing Organisation.

Importing An Equine: If the equine comes from within the EU then it should have a valid passport and you will need to update your ownership, with a Passport Issuing Organisation in the UK, within 30 days. If it originated from outside the EU and does not have a valid passport you must obtain one within 30 days.

Day to Day Responsibility: It is an offence to own or keep an equine without a passport. The passport must accompany the equine and be available for immediate inspection with a few exceptions. If you have a horse on loan, run a livery yard with horses on full livery or you transport an equine on behalf of the owner, you can be liable for prosecution if you do not have access to the passport. Vets are required to ask to see the passport before treating an equine. The vet will need to be aware of the human consumption status of the horse before deciding which category of medicines may be given to the horse. For an example an equine prescribed Phenylbutazone (Bute) would have to be permanently excluded from the food chain.

When the Equine Dies: The passport must be returned to the PIO within 30 days stating date and cause of death if known to comply with the legislation.

Owners & keepers of equines may be issued with Fixed Penalty Notices or fined up to £5,000 if they fail to comply with the legislation which is enforced by Local Authorities and the Food Standards Agency.

Please keep this sheet for your information.

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