

African horse sickness control

Vaccination permissions

2024

**JD Grewar & CT Weyer
2024**

Introduction and executive summary

Annual vaccination against African horse sickness (AHS) is compulsory in South Africa (Animal Diseases Act, 35 of 1984) except in the AHS free and surveillance zones (FZ and SZ respectively) in the AHS controlled area in the Western Cape Province. Vaccination against AHS in these zones can only be performed following written approval from the Veterinary Services of the Western Cape Department of Agriculture (WCDOA). Permission to vaccinate against AHS is only granted for vaccination to be performed between 1 June and 31st October each year. This vaccination period is based on the potential for vaccine virus re-assortment/reversion to virulence and the risk of transmission during periods of increased vector activity¹. The restricted vaccination period mitigates this risk.

The process for vaccination permissions is summarized and available online [here](#)².

For the 2024 vaccination season (1 June–31 October), no permissions to vaccinate against African horse sickness (AHS) were issued in the AHS Free and Surveillance Zones. This decision was taken to align with updated international trade conditions for exports to the European Union (EU) that prohibit vaccination in ZA-1 and its surveillance zone, and to avoid jeopardising market access while policy discussions continued. Routine vaccination continued in the AHS protection and infected zone under national legislation.

Why no permissions were issued in 2024

Regulatory shift for EU trade

In 2024, the EU reopened the ability for South Africa to export live horses to its countries. The EU legislation that was passed ([EU 2024/1170](#)) introduced a specific condition for South Africa (AHS-ZA) that prohibits vaccination in the AHS Free Zone and Surveillance Zone (ZA-1 and Surveillance zone). Aligning with this condition was necessary to sustain exports while South Africa engaged with partners on the interpretation of the legislation in context of other EU regulations that consider AHS vaccination (such as EU 2021/[403](#) and [404](#) – the listing of 3rd countries and model health certificates; EU [2020/692](#) – General AHS rules; and [2023/361](#) – control of AHS within the Union). Historically, permissions in the AHS FZ and SZ were limited to the low-vector period (1 June–31 October) and issued under strict veterinary oversight, mainly to support horses that move to and from the infected area. In 2024, permissions were paused to ensure coherence with the new trade framework.

Historically permissions issued in the AHS FZ and SZ predominantly supported movement requirements (over nine in ten permissions). Overall, coverage from permissions in recent years suggested ~40–50% of the known population in the AHS FZ and SZ was vaccinated annually. In 2024, [review of movements](#) between the AHS Protection Zone and the AHS FZ and SZ showed that horses

¹ Weyer, C.T. et al., 2016. African horse sickness caused by genome reassortment and reversion to virulence of live, attenuated vaccine viruses, South Africa, 2004–2014. *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, 22(12).

² <http://jdata.co.za/myhorse/documents/infographics/Vaccination%20Schema/1.%20Vaccinating%20against%20AHS%20in%20the%20Free%20and%20Surveillance%20Zone.pdf>

requiring urgent vaccination - both to comply with future movement control and to protect individuals during temporary movements into the AHS Infected Zone and back—were vaccinated within the Protection Zone rather than in the AHS FZ and SZ. Thus, the risk-mitigating intent for these cases was achieved without issuing permissions in the AHS FZ and SZ.

Acknowledgements

We thank Western Cape Veterinary Services (WCDOA), private veterinarians, and owners for their cooperation and patience during this policy transition year.