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African horse sickness control

Vaccination permissions

2025

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2025

Western Cape Government
FOR YOU

2025

Applications

769 on 409 holdings for 5306 horses

Approved

4870 horses (92% of applicants)

Reason

Movement 100%

Vets

24 practices with top 5 vaccinating ~81%

Repeats

49.3% from 2023-2025

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Introduction

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 in the AHS controlled area in the Western Cape Province. Vaccination against AHS in the free and surveillance zones should be considered if required for movement purposes when moving to a zone that would require vaccination in order to return and can only be performed following written approval from the Veterinary Services of the Western Cape Department of Agriculture (WCDOA). Vaccination in these zones is otherwise not recommended. Vaccination against AHS in the AHS controlled area, including the protection zone, is only to be performed between 1 June and 31st October each year. Permission to vaccinate against AHS is therefore only granted during this period. 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 activity[1]. The restricted vaccination period mitigates this risk.

The process for vaccination permissions is summarised and available online here[2] . This report briefly summarises the vaccination permission applications that were received, and the descriptive statistics of those permissions that were issued during **2025**. Permissions are given on an individual horse basis, with horses associated with specific holdings, and the information is analysed as such. Where horses have had multiple applications submitted only a single (and generally the first) application is considered for analysis.

Updates in 2025

An online application system was piloted and implemented during 2025. Through a dedicated web portal, clients applied for vaccination permissions and were able to upload horse passport documentation directly as part of the application process. To comply with recommendations arising from previous EU and UK trade audits, and to align with national regulatory directives, applicants were required to specify explicit likely movement destinations for each horse. This requirement ensured that vaccination permissions were issued on the basis of a realistic and demonstrable need for vaccination, specifically for horses intending to enter the AHS infected zone and subsequently return to the AHS controlled area.

Summary of permissions issued

The total number of vaccination permission applications received is shown in Table 1, together with comparisons to previous seasons. It should be noted that the evaluation approach has been refined for the present analysis, and totals reported here may therefore differ slightly from those presented in prior annual reports.

[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] https://myhorse.jshiny.com/myhorse/landing/resources/infographics/vaccinate_ca.pdf

The number of unique applications and horses applied for has shown a sustained decline over successive years, with this trend becoming more pronounced in 2025. In 2025, a total of 769 applications associated with 5 306 horses were submitted, representing the lowest levels recorded to date in the vaccination permission programme. This corresponds to a 12.6% decrease in the number of applications received (from 880 in 2023 to 769 in 2025) and a 15.4% decrease in the number of horses applied for (from 6 269 in 2023 to 5 306 in 2025).

Of the horses applied for vaccination in 2025, 4 870 (91.8%) were granted permission, while 436 (8.2%) were not granted. The observed reduction in both application volume and the number of horses applied for is temporally associated with the introduction of the online application system and the implementation of stricter requirements regarding passport validity and the specification of explicit, realistic movement destinations. These measures were introduced to strengthen regulatory compliance and to ensure that vaccination permissions are issued on the basis of a demonstrable and justified need for vaccination.

Table 1: Number of applications received for vaccination permissions with associated horses.

Year	*Applications received / Associated holdings*	*Total horses applied for*	*Total horses granted*	*Total horses not granted*
2017	1080/645	6947	6815 (98.1%)	132 (1.9%)
2018	1118/605	7014	6906 (98.5%)	108 (1.5%)
2019	1108/610	7055	6942 (98.4%)	113 (1.6%)
2020	976/566	6509	6389 (98.2%)	120 (1.8%)
2021	924/570	6625	6529 (98.6%)	96 (1.4%)
2022	890/528	6318	6252 (99%)	66 (1%)
2023	880/501	6269	6177 (98.5%)	92 (1.5%)
2024	-	-	-	-
2025	769/409	5306	4870 (91.8%)	436 (8.2%)

In 2025, 24 veterinarians and/or veterinary practices were registered as the associated vet likely to perform the vaccination. This is a decrease from 29 in 2020, 37 in 2021, 29 in 2022 and 40 in 2023. The top 5 practices were responsible for vaccinating 81.4% of permission-granted horses (n = 3962 of 4870), and the top 10 practices were responsible for 95.2% of all permission-granted horses (n = 4637 of 4870).

Table 2 shows the reasons that were provided by applicants (granted horses only) when requesting permission to vaccinate. For the first year since at least 2017 all applications were to enable horses to comply with AHS movement requirements.

Table 2: Reasons provided for the vaccination of horses.

Overarching reason	*Sub-reason*	*Count*
Movement requirements	Movement	2077 (42.6%)
	competition	2233 (45.8%)
	breeding	559 (11.5%)
	future export	1 (0%)
Total		**4870**

We now have eight years of detailed, individual horse-level information for the vaccination permission process in the AHS controlled area (2017–2025). In 2025, a total of 2 403 horses that were granted permission had also been granted permission in the previous operational season (2023), representing 49.3% of all permission-granted horses for the year. This reflects a marked reduction in year-on-year repeat vaccination compared with earlier seasons, where between 2018 and 2023 the proportion of horses granted permission in consecutive seasons ranged from 58.9% to 67.7%.

Across the full evaluation period (2017–2025), 20104 unique horses were granted permission to be vaccinated at least once. Of the 4 870 horses granted permission in 2025, 2 850 (58.5%) had also been granted permission in at least one prior season between 2017 and 2023, indicating that a substantial proportion of horses vaccinated in 2025 had a historical record of prior vaccination under the permission system.

When vaccination permissions are requested, they are issued for prospective vaccination, and follow-up verification of actual vaccination is not undertaken. Here we evaluate horses that have been granted vaccination permission since 2017 and cross-reference these against the our movement recording system to establish what proportion of those granted permission would reasonably have required it. Of the 20104 individual horses that have been granted permission to be vaccinated since 2017, 71.4% (14 348) have moved in a manner that would have likely required AHS vaccination, based on presence in the movement recording system (including the AHS multiple movement system). Of the remaining 28.6% (5756), the primary reason for permission requested was competition (56.6%), followed by general movement (15.9%).

Conclusion

Vaccination coverage within the AHS controlled area, including the AHS surveillance and free zones, remains substantial, with a large proportion of the resident equine population having been vaccinated under the permission system at least once since 2017. A high level of repeat vaccination continues to be observed, although the proportion of horses granted permission in consecutive operational seasons declined markedly in 2025 compared with previous years.

The 2025 vaccination season was characterised by a notable reduction in both the number of applications received and the number of horses applied for, reaching the lowest levels recorded since at least 2017. This decline coincided with the introduction of the online application system and the implementation of stricter requirements regarding passport validity and the specification of explicit, realistic movement plans. Together, these measures appear to have contributed to a more considered and targeted submission of applications, ensuring that permissions are increasingly sought only where a demonstrable and justified need for vaccination exists.

This shift is further reflected in the substantially higher proportion of applications that were declined in 2025 compared with previous seasons. For the first time since at least 2017, all granted applications in 2025 were issued solely to enable compliance with AHS movement requirements, with no permissions granted for discretionary or precautionary reasons. These

findings indicate a tightening alignment between vaccination permissions and their intended regulatory purpose as a movement-facilitation tool.

Overall, the 2025 season represents an important transition point in the administration of vaccination permissions within the AHS controlled area. The combined effects of digitalisation, enhanced screening, and clearer regulatory criteria have resulted in fewer, more appropriate applications, improved regulatory compliance, and a more defensible basis for the continued controlled use of AHS vaccination in the surveillance and free zones. These developments strengthen the integrity of the vaccination permission programme and support its role in safeguarding both animal health and international trade obligations.

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References and Acknowledgements

We are grateful to both horse owners and veterinarians for their patience during the vaccination permission season. We are grateful for the continued support of the Western Cape Veterinary Services who also assist in this program.