

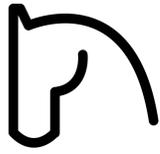
Investigating opportunities for community-based surveillance of equines in Switzerland

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Background



In Switzerland there are two passive surveillance systems in place to track equine health; the mandatory reporting of notifiable diseases according to Swiss law and a voluntary veterinary-based surveillance system for clinical signs and non-notifiable diseases, called Equinella. Additional surveillance involving the equine owners may help to improve disease detection in the complex equine community. The concept of community-based surveillance is defined by the World Health Organisation in 2018 as the *systematic detection and reporting of events of public health significance within a community by community members*. When adapted to veterinary public health matters it can offer a great potential to improve the surveillance of equine health.

In our study we have investigated opportunities for establishing and evaluating community-based surveillance of equines in Switzerland. We conducted an online survey to assess the Swiss equine owner's interest in contributing to the surveillance and tested an online community-based surveillance tool as a pilot project for a year. After the pilot phase we have assessed the limitations by conducting phone interviews.

Material & methods



Online survey

July 2018 –
Send to 7500 Swiss equine owners

Complete questionnaires returned: 1078 (14 % response rate)

Do you see a potential in community-based surveillance of Swiss equines?

Did you observe clinical signs in your equine(s)?



Online community-based surveillance tool «Equi-Commun»

Launched in October 2018

Online community-based surveillance tool

Data collection for one year

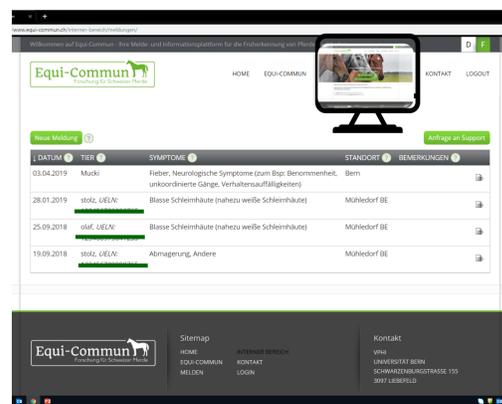
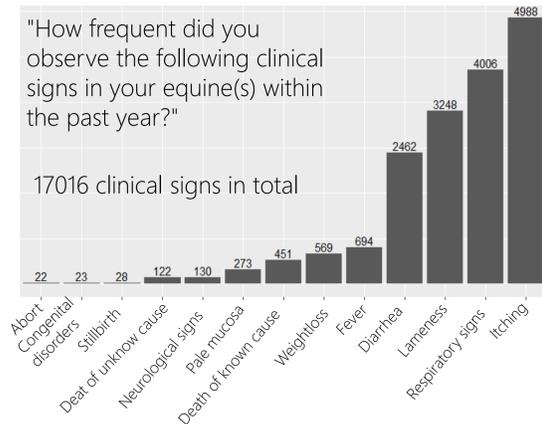
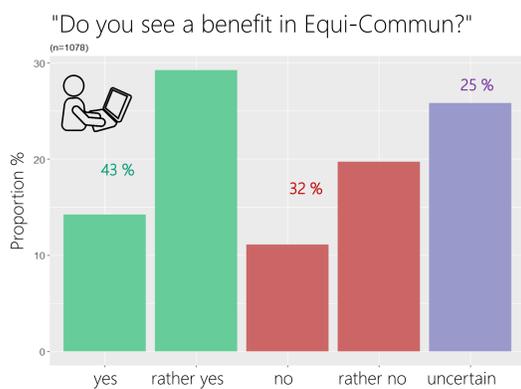


Semi-structured qualitative interviews

October 2019 – with 10 randomly selected equine owners

- What do you know and think about Equi-Commun?
- Do you feel sufficiently informed?
- Have you reported? If not, why? What do you suspect could be reasons for others not to report?

Results



Only 4 reports

Have you reported?

"No. We haven't reported any symptoms. Nock on wood..., My horse is fine. ... But I could report symptoms, it occurs to me right now; the one mare we have, she has skin problems on her belly. So it's not a summer allergy because she has it all year round. But she is now under medical treatment, she is not my horse, I cannot really influence that. That would be something you could report, for example. But suppose I report it now, what happens then?" - Interviewee 3

What do you think about Equi-Commun?

"Yes, I think that's (Equi-Commun) a good idea, anything that helps, helps. Yes, well I find early detection and other symptoms illuminating, that can be tremendously important. In humans too, not just animals. Because a disease progresses differently in other people" - Interviewee 5

What do you know about Equi-Commun?

"I once received this in a survey, but I didn't follow it up." - Interviewee 9

What do you suspect could be reasons for others not to report?

"I might be able to tell you what happened to me. I filled out the survey once, and then I kind of really forgot about it. I was no longer aware that such a thing (Equi-Commun) exists and that something should be done about it." - Interviewee 1

Do you feel sufficiently informed?

"Too little, actually. I have found that I now mix in and see how it continues, but nothing has come for a long time. One did not know then, is it going on now or does it run in the sand." - Interviewee 4

Discussion and conclusions



- Majority of the questionnaire participants saw a **benefit in community-based surveillance** in the Swiss equine population and equine owners (self-reported) have observed a high number (17016 in total from all 1078 respondents) of clinical signs within one year, retrospectively.



- Equi-Commun was communicated in various equine sports and magazines, on social media platforms, through newsletters and presentations, yet **received only 4 reports** within its one year pilot phase.



- Participants could not accurately remember Equi-Commun.
- Even though some participants reported to be sufficiently informed about Equi-Commun, the majority was only partially or rather **wrongly informed**.
- Participants **feared consequences** of submitting in reports.
- Participants mentioned they had **healthy equines** within the past year.
- Concept of clinical signs being predictors of diseases and the difference to diseases is **not clear** to participants.

Key message:

Community-based surveillance has a potential in the Swiss equine industry. Nevertheless, achieving continuous data reporting by equine owners requires major resources in terms of time and work capacity for project communication, advertisement and propagation. Additionally the fear of consequences on equine owners due to reporting needs to be addressed.