

Equine Grass Sickness National Biobank



Vets Information Sheet

Moredun and The Equine Grass Sickness Fund (EGSF) with generous support from the British Horse Society, have launched a nationwide biobank to gather samples relevant to grass sickness research.

Equine Grass Sickness (EGS) is a devastating disease where around 80% of cases are euthanised for welfare reasons. Despite the disease being recognised for over 100 years, progress with research into the causal agents involved has been seriously hampered by the lack of suitable samples from EGS cases. This study aims to address this by developing a national biobank of samples, so that in future, researchers can apply to the EGSF to use the samples in appropriate projects to further EGS knowledge and ultimately provide solutions.

It is really important that the causal agents are established so that EGS can be prevented in future and vets that see EGS cases in practice or as referrals have a crucial part to play to help progress research.

Sample collection and sample packs

The great majority of EGS cases are euthanised in practice and the samples critical for research are lost. These samples include blood and faecal samples taken on first visit for diagnostic purposes, as well as post-mortem tissue samples, ileum and, if possible, intervertebral ganglia of the sympathetic chain. By horse owners consenting to allow vets to send these samples to Moredun for the biobank, the samples would be safely preserved for future research.

Sample packs, containing the protocols required and sample containers, are available from Dr Kathy Geyer at the address below. These packs will arrive in a biological sample box suitable for posting such samples, with a pre-paid return address label.

Consent forms, ethics and GDPR compliance

Owner consent forms are an essential part of our Ethics approval for the biobank project. As there tends to be a very small window of opportunity when grass sickness is suspected until the horse is euthanised, we are asking horse owners to think about and prepare for this in advance. This means that in the unfortunate event of EGS, the owner is armed with all the details they need and are not having to think about this at a very distressing time.

We are requesting that horse owners who are keen to help EGS research, sign the owner's consent form and keep it with the horse's passport. On the vet attending a suspected EGS case, the owner's consent form can then be obtained and held by the veterinary practice in their client records. The Veterinary Defence Society have confirmed that oral permission from horse owner to the attending vet is also permitted, as long as it is written up fully in the client's records. For biobank sample compliance, a vet's declaration for the attending vet to complete is required confirming that the samples sent have the owner's permission. Please return this form to Dr Kathy Geyer at the address below. Copies of these forms can be downloaded at: <https://grassickness.org.uk/research/egs-biobank-vets-information>

The biobank will only require the equine microchip ID as a sample identifier, which will be seen only by Moredun and EGSF. For further research purposes or publication of results, the ID data will be anonymised.

All samples and data held in the biobank are collected and stored with ethical approval from: The Moredun Veterinary Ethical Review Committee and the R(D)SVS and Easter Bush Campus Human (Research) Ethical Review Committee and will be used anonymously for EGS research. The samples and case data is held in accordance with GDPR regulations under the Moredun Group Privacy Policy, available at www.moredun.org.uk/privacy-policy. The results of research studies arising from the biobank will be published in relevant scientific journals, on the Equine Grass Sickness Fund website, and distributed via newsletters and social media.

Biobank project contact

For any further information, sample packs or to return Vet's Declaration forms please contact: Dr Kathy Geyer Moredun Research Institute, Pentland Science Park, Bush Loan, Penicuik, Midlothian, EH26 0PZ.
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