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META: Have you missed the safe vaccination period? Find out when it is safe to administer the AHS vaccine and what precautions you can take during an outbreak.

# African Horse Sickness: When is it Safe to Vaccinate?

In order to compete at registered events, competition horses need to have their annual vaccinations, which need to be administered and documented on your horse's passport by a veterinarian. In South Africa, these vaccinations include the African Horse Sickness (AHS) vaccination, and the Equine Influenza vaccine. Some of us may still be uncertain as to when it is safe to vaccinate, what vaccinations should be used for AHS, as well as what precautions can be taken during the anticipated AHS outbreak season.

## The Registered AHS Vaccine

In South Africa, the only registered vaccine for AHS is the African horse sickness vaccine produced by Onderstepoort Biological Products (OBP). The OBP vaccine is a live vaccine, this means that it will cause a mild form of the disease to allow the horse to build immunity to the infection. This also means that the vaccine has to be maintained in a **strict cold-chain** in order to remain effective; this product should therefore be kept refrigerated and transported with caution. The OBP vaccine is administered in two doses which must be separately given in a minimum of 21 days apart.

## When is it Safe to Administer the Live Vaccine?

It is strongly recommended that the AHS vaccine is administered between 1<sup>st</sup> June and 31<sup>st</sup> October across South Africa. This is to avoid having horses with a viraemia, which can then cause the disease to spread through biting midges, during the natural challenge period which is anticipated in the summer season, peaking at around the month of March. It is therefore encouraged that horses receive the first vaccine in June, and the second in August. This allows for the given days apart between administering the two OBP vaccines and it allows the horse to build up immunity before the anticipated challenge season.

## What Precautions Can Be Taken During the Challenge Period?

Precautionary measures should still be taken during the challenge period, especially after the first summer rain which is when the population of the AHS spreading midges - (Culicoides midges), become plentiful and only dwindle after the first frost. Avoiding these insects is the best way to protect your horse. Precautionary measures include the use of [repellents](#), [various traps](#) in stables, and using [protective fly sheets](#) when turning out your horse during the day.

