

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Where the information starts! What, Who, and Where

Information for horse communities dealing with COVID-19 from the Equine Information Source

Written by Amanda St Onge

The Equine Information Source is a team of students in the Bachelor of Bio-Resource Management (BBRM) degree program majoring in Equine Management who are working to provide information for equine communities dealing with COVID-19.

Our team consists of three student research assistants. Caleigh Copelin is a third year student who has been riding and working with horses for 11 years in the hunter/jumper industry. She has worked for private barns, lesson facilities and even an overnight summer horseback riding camp. Amanda St Onge is also a third year student who grew up training and rehoming wild mustangs with her family and working on her neighbour's cattle ranch in British Columbia. She has 19 years of experience with mostly western riding but has dabbled a bit in English. Elizabeth Crouchman is a graduating student who has been involved in the equine industry for approximately 14 years. She started out riding saddleseat but has recently made the switch to western riding. Supervising the students is Dr. Merkies, associate professor at the University of Guelph, and developer of the BBRM major, the only equine degree program in Canada. She teaches numerous equine undergraduate courses while engaged in research projects involving equine behaviour, welfare and management. She is also a board member with the Donkey Sanctuary of Canada and the International Society for Equitation Science.

These bright young minds are dedicated to providing helpful information for horse communities around Canada such as highlighting specific risk factors in the spread of COVID-19 in barns, creating infographics and signage that can be printed and displayed in barns, and conducting videos and interviews with industry experts on topics that will assist horse owners and facility managers during this pandemic. This information can be found on the Equestrian Canada website <https://www.equestrian.ca/industry/about/covid-19-resources>.

The students are also working with Equine Guelph to provide resources to the horse community. As moderators on the Horse Portal community called For The Herd, they research expert advice and provide answers to questions on different aspects of the equine industry dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. These topics include nutrition, health care, farrier, pasture management, safety and prevention, risk management, financial management, future development, and of course general questions that do not fall into any of these categories. This forum is available only to applicants of For The Herd through Ontario Equestrian. This initiative was created to help barn owners whose main business and income derives from riding lessons. For more information or to get involved with this program, go to <https://www.fortheherd.ca/>.

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Caption: The Equine Information Source is a group of dedicated students in the BBRM Equine Management degree program who, under the supervision of Dr. Merkies, are working to provide resources to horse owners and facility managers to help navigate through the pandemic. Clockwise from top left: Amanda St Onge, Elizabeth Crouchman, Caleigh Copelin, and Dr. Merkies, surrounding the team's personalized Equine Information Source logo.

For more information, contact Dr Katrina Merkies, kmerkies@uoguelph.ca