

LETTER TO PARISH/TOWN/DISTRICT/COUNTY COUNCILS INFORMING THEM OF THE HEALTH AND SAFETY RISKS OF EITHER ALLOWING, OR NOT STOPPING, A HUNT FROM MEETING ON PUBLICLY OWNED LAND (INCLUDING ROADS).

As the Hunts will again be using our towns and villages to hold their Boxing Day/New Year's Day Meets and Parades this year, it is hoped that councils will take seriously and act upon their duties in ensuring these are using our towns and villages safely. Bringing the amount of horses and hunting hounds that they do, in the manner in which they do, into populated, sometimes enclosed, public spaces carries a number of risks and dangers to the public's health and safety.

Schedule 1 of The Health and Safety (Enforcing Authority) Regulations 1998—legislation determining which activities are enforced by local authorities—includes, at Paragraph 9, 'the practice or presentation of the arts, sports, games, entertainment or other cultural or recreational activities'. Accordingly, it is incumbent upon councils to ensure that the Hunts apply all controls necessary to limit risk to the public attending these events. Hunts should produce risk assessments for receipt by councils detailing how they intend to apply these controls.

Councils should ensure that any Hunts intending to hold their Boxing Day/New Year's Day Meet and Parade in any of our towns and villages put in place the following measures:

1) Hounds

Hounds should be cordoned off at these meets. If there is occasion where hounds and public may mingle, handwashing facilities should be provided and signposted. Instruction to wash hands must be given. This means liquid soap and running water. Children on the day mix with the hounds. They touch them, are licked by them, and then touch their own mouths, their eyes and noses. Hounds put their heads into buggies.

Unlike domestic dogs, hunting hounds are fed on raw fallen stock—farm animals which have died in the fields, often of no known cause. The bodies, or ABPs (animal body parts) collected on 'flesh rounds' and fed to hounds are generally classed as Category 2 by Defra's Animal and Plant Health Agency. Category 2 is 'high risk', and includes: animals rejected from abattoirs due to having infectious diseases; carcasses containing residues from authorised treatments; unhatched poultry that has died in its shell; carcasses of animals killed for disease control purposes; carcasses of dead livestock; manure; digestive tract content. (Be reminded, too, that APHA rarely runs checks unless individual concerns are raised.) None of this is considered fit for the pet food market.

This diet, and the close proximity of dogs in kennels, means that hounds may pass on a multitude of pathogens and zoonoses known to be carried by farm animals and transmissible to humans; diseases such as bTB, Campylobacteriosis, Cryptosporidiosis, E. Coli 0157 and Verotoxigenic E. coli, Leptospirosis, Salmonella. On Boxing Day 2024, a faecal sample from a hound was collected using all appropriate sterile equipment and sent for testing. A local councillor for that town reported back to council that this sample returned a finding of Salmonella.

Handwipes or gels are not effective for the removal of disease-causing micro-organisms. Liquid soap and running water are. Councils should know that the Hunts' insurers, Lycetts, exclude cover for the transmission of communicable diseases.

Supporting links:

[Action Against Fox Hunting - Insurance](#)

[Dogs for Good - Zoonoses](#)

[Horse and Hound - bTB confirmed](#)

[Protect the Wild - Hunt Kennels Risk](#)

[The Ecologist - Foxhounds & bTB](#)

[Gov.uk - ABP Categories](#)

[Gov.uk - Approved Premises](#)

[HSE - Visitor Attractions](#)

[HSE - Zoonoses](#)

[Daily Mail - Petting Farm Outbreak](#)

[Mirror - Parasite Infection](#)

2) Horses

Horses should be cordoned off at the Meet. Any equestrian activity is high risk. Horses are known to be unpredictable animals, often skittish. Being herd animals, one skittish horse can affect others. Horses can be spooked by noise or other stimuli. Even the most highly trained horses, accustomed to city life and familiar with their riders, can take fright, as borne out by the spooked cavalry horses that took flight in London on 24/04/24 and 01/07/24, causing damage to themselves, to persons, to vehicles, and to street furniture.

Horses ridden on Boxing/New Year's Day are far more likely to present risk because: these horses are unused to towns and groups of people; these Meets attract riders who may not often hunt, whose horses are unused to these surroundings; hirelings are often used, meaning horse and rider may be unfamiliar with each other; horses may be unfamiliar with other horses; organisers do not vet horses or rider competency; organisers expect each rider to have their own insurance, but it is unknown whether this is checked.

Hunts are known to bring horses with ribbons tied in their tails. The public is generally unaware of the significance of these: red signifies a kicker, yellow a stallion, green an inexperienced horse, blue a stallion or aggressive gelding. No horse with such risk indicators should be in close proximity to the public.

On Boxing Day 2024, in a square where the public mingled freely with horses and hounds, a lady attempting to prevent a child approaching a horse spooked it, causing it to kick out. Had anyone been standing directly behind, this could have resulted in serious injury. Such incidents highlight the necessity of proper risk assessments and visible enforcement.

Supporting links:

[Psychology Today - Horse Sports Risks](#)

[Just Horse Riders - Horse Riding Risks](#)

[Pembrokeshire Herald - Boxing Day Incident](#)

[The Bolton News - Hunt Drama](#)

[Independent - Hunts Boxing Day](#)

[Hunts ABS - Health & Safety Hazard](#)

3) Traffic and Public Safety

The Hunts must not stop or obstruct traffic without a TTRO. There must be no risk that emergency services could be hindered. Any marshal must be trained personnel. Where horses and hounds use roads past the public, cordons/barriers should be in place. Where

Hunts are likely to obstruct vehicles, official road closures should be secured. Proper road closures allow emergency services to plan alternative routes, potentially saving lives.

Road closures should be secured using TTROs to ensure councils are covered if an accident occurs. Insurers expect traffic management under lawful powers; Section 21 of TCPA 1847 is too antiquated to meet these requirements. Closing roads without legal authority exposes organisers and councils to liability, and insurers may refuse claims, risking financial loss. Councils owe a duty of care to road users and pedestrians.

4) Insurance

As stated above, the organiser's insurance does not cover transmission of disease or accidents caused by visiting riders and horses. It may be invalidated if there is either no road closure, or an inadequate road closure. This may leave the council liable to 'foot the bill' if there is an incident with no other financial recourse.

5) Public Order

Hunting is a controversial activity that can attract protesters, creating a foreseeable risk of confrontation and disorder.

As these events take place on public land, a council may expose itself to poor public regard and financial liability where it has taken no action to avoid this risk.

6) Actions for the Council

We have provided a detailed assessment of the risks associated with any Boxing Day or New Year's Day meet. This assessment was submitted in advance to support the prevention of sickness or injury to the public, particularly children. The Council's focus should be on preventing incidents rather than disputing accountability before or after an incident. We have discharged our responsibility by advising you of these risks. We will attend the meet ourselves to monitor safety and record any incidents. The next steps now rest with the Council. It is for you to decide what mitigating actions should be taken.

Please let me know what measures this Council will be taking to address and enforce the above.