

What to do in an emergency

Being faced with an equine emergency can be a daunting and nerve wracking time but your actions really can determine the difference between a positive and a negative outcome.

Loch Leven Equine Practice explains

Knowing when to call the vet really can make a huge difference to the prognosis of the situation. Having your vets emergency number saved on your phone and somewhere accessible on your yard is always a sensible thing to do. No matter what the situation gather as much information as possible and remain calm. If you are calm the vet team can then instruct you further with what to do. If you are panicking it can be difficult to relay information so remember even if you are panicking inside take a deep breath and try to remain as calm as possible!

Your chosen veterinary practice should be situated within a suitable distance to allow the vets to get there quickly no matter what time of day or night.

As with many situations preparation is the key and so it is important to have a basic first aid kit.

At the least this should contain:

- Digital thermometer
- Citrogel/Intrasite gel
- Wound dressings such as Melolin, softban, equiwrap/vetwrap and cotton wool
- Hibiscrub

It is important to get into the habit of taking your horses pulse, temperature and respiratory rate regularly to see what are the normal parameters are for your horse. We would also recommend checking for digital pulses. Videos of how to do this correctly can be found in our YouTube clips via Scottish Equestrian TV.

Of course there are many different types of emergency and each situation requires something different.

Wounds

This is course is a huge area to talk about and each wound will need different treatment but here are some basic rules.

- Evaluate the degree of lameness - If possible move the horse to stable. If this is not possible keep the horse still and immediately call the vet.
- Where is the wound located? If it over a joint / tendon sheath / bone or near to the eye, please call your vet even if the wound is small.
- What type of wound is it – i.e a graze, laceration, puncture or kick and how deep is it? Puncture wounds can be just as serious as big lacerations so please don't ignore these especially if your horse has a swelling and is lame.
- Is there discharge? If the wound is close to a joint and there is yellow fluid coming from the wound please call the vet immediately.

- Does the horse have tetanus cover? This is very important and tetanus cover should always be kept up to date.
- If there is still blood coming from the wound you need to stop the blood flow. Arterial blood is bright red in colour and will be pumping from the wound - apply a tight bandage to the area to stop the blood. Venous blood is darker in colour and trickles from the wound. Once clean apply a bandage with normal pressure.

Wounds (unless arterial blood) should be cleaned using cotton wool and very dilute hibiscrub (1:20). Use a gentle amount of pressure to clean the wound to remove contamination, too much pressure will only drive dirt further into the wound. Once clean apply a dressing whilst waiting for the vet. Dressing should always have a base layer of something soft such as softban and/or cotton wool before applying an elasticated bandage.

Foot punctures

Foot punctures are potentially very serious and should be assessed by a vet. If you find your horse with a nail in his foot do NOT remove the nail unless they risk driving the nail further in to the foot. This is so the vet can assess exactly how far the nail has penetrated and the position of the nail. If you have to remove it to prevent it from causing further damage please mark exactly where the nail went in, exactly how far it went in and the angle of penetration.

Colic

If you find your horse with colic it is always important to call the vet. To walk or not to walk is always a question people ask. The simple answer is that it very much depends on the type of colic as to the benefit that walking will do. A simple guide would be never get yourself hurt and in the line of danger. If it is safe to enter the stable remove all food. If the horse is sweating then pop a sweat rug on.

If the horse is lying down quietly then it is better to leave them settled until the vet arrives. If the horse is mildly uncomfortable and it is safe to walk the horse then walking in hand may help.

It is important to remember that colicing horses can be very dangerous so please never compromise your own safety. Instead wait until the vet arrives and the horse can be managed and sedated correctly.

Eyes

Wounds to the eyes are something which many people overlook but a sore eye should be dealt with immediately. This is because eye problems can become a medical emergency very quickly. Eye wounds are also extremely painful for the horse and can easily result in the loss of an eye. Please call your vet immediately even if it is just for advice.

Remember whatever the emergency no matter how big or small you think it may be please call your vet even if it is to assess if or not you need a visit. We see many horses where problems become much worse due to them being left and not treated correctly. Of course we understand that you don't want to spend money on calling the vet unnecessarily but by not phoning we see many owners end up with bills which could have been avoided by seeking veterinary advice.

Know your horse's TPR

Average in resting horses:

Temperature = 98.5-100.5°F or 37-38° C

Heart rate = 24-45 p/m

Respiratory = 8-20 p/m

If you would like any additional information please call us on 01577 841010.

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