

When is an emergency a real emergency?

Common sense will tell you when a situation is a genuine emergency. Even for the most experienced horse owners a real emergency situation can be a daunting occasion, but the first thing to remember is not to panic.

Call us immediately and calmly and clearly describe the clinical signs. Each situation is individual so we will advise what to do whilst waiting for us to arrive. No matter what the emergency situation the safety of you and others should be paramount – a horse in distress can easily become frightened and as a result may panic. A panicking horse can easily cause further accidents and injuries. If your horse is unsettled and agitated and the situation allows then put him in a stable with a deep bed while you wait for us to arrive, (leaving the head collar on).

A genuine emergency can be anything from a horse that is non-weight bearing, bleeding heavily, in severe pain, has an injury to the eye, is struggling to foal, has a suspected fracture or has been involved in a road traffic accident. This list is by no means exclusive and if you are at all worried about your horse then please do call us – even if for advice - that's what we are here for.

What should I do whilst waiting for the vet to arrive?

Stay calm and clearly describe to the admin team the emergency your horse is facing. Listen to the instructions given. As long as clear instructions have been given as to the location of your horse you can be assured that we will be there as soon as we can.

General guidelines

- Even the most placid horses that are in pain and/or scared can be very dangerous – be extremely careful at all times and do not put yourself in a compromised position.
- If you suspect the horse has a fracture, is non-weight bearing, or is bleeding heavily DO NOT move him unless advised, or it is absolutely necessary.
- If the horse is bleeding heavily (i.e. bright red blood is pulsing) apply pressure to the wound using a clean towel. Where possible also apply pressure above the wound to help slow down the flow of blood.
- In the situation of colic it is important to assess the horse before entering the stable. If safe to do so remove all food and water. The horse may be sweating so if applicable remove any thick rugs. Depending on the severity of the colic you may be advised by your vet to gently walk the horse in-hand if it is safe to do so – do not let the horse eat grass.
- If your horse is having difficulty foaling keep the area quiet so as not to panic the mare and wait for the vet to arrive.
- Be prepared for us to arrive – make sure there is somewhere to park, enough light to work in and have a bucket of warm water and a clean towel ready.

- Remember to stay calm!

We will also need to see your horse straight away if they have a wound over a joint, even if the wound looks minor. If left untreated an infected joint may prove fatal, and in all cases will require treatment from your vet.

Incidents involving the Emergency Services

Every horse owner dreads the thought of being involved in a road traffic accident and having to call the emergency services to assist in the rescue of their horse. Owners can now be assured that positive steps are being taken towards specialist training for equine vets across the UK in order to deal with these situations.

May 2007 saw the Emergency Services Protocol and the Equine Rescue Fund put into place. The Emergency Services Protocol is a collaboration between the British Equine Veterinary Association and the British Horse Society who are working alongside Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service to train vets in equine rescue techniques. Once training has been completed the veterinary practice is then put onto a list, which is available to all local emergency services, enabling them to call the practice for assistance in the event of an emergency.

Loch Leven Equine Practice is proud to say we are one of the practices listed on the register.

When do I call out of hours?

Again it is largely down to common sense, for a genuine emergency it doesn't matter what time of day or night it is, practices have a 24 hour on-call rota so that there is a vet on call to help. While some things can wait until the next day, such as booking your annual vaccinations, there are many situations where your horse will need veterinary attention immediately.

To make things more simple vet visits can be loosely grouped into three sets – emergencies, prompt attention and routine visits.

Genuine emergencies, such as those discussed above, require a vet no matter what time of day or night and not calling us could lead to the condition becoming more serious or fatal for your horse.

Horses requiring prompt attention may not be facing a life and death situation but will probably still need to be seen the same day. This may include swelling and/or heat, a sudden onset of lameness, a loss of appetite, lethargy, respiratory associated problems (such as coughing, nasal discharge), a slight rise in temperature/sweating and minor wounds*.

Vaccinations, dentals, health checks, slight intermittent lameness, vettings and loss of performance (with no other obvious clinical signs)*, are some of the things that can be booked in advance with no detriment to the horses' welfare, and would not be a concern out of office hours.

Be Observant

It is important to know your horse and their normal behaviour. Once familiar with their routine you will be quick to notice any changes that may be early signs that your horse is

unwell. Check their legs regularly and note any swellings, such as windgalls, that are consistently present.

Your horses' welfare is paramount so if in doubt call us on 01577 841010.

*These lists offer a guideline only – we advise that you call us if you are at all concerned.

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