



Ballybrown Equine Clinic



Ballybrown Veterinary Clinic, Ballybrown, Clarina, Co. Limerick, Ireland.
Tel: +353 (0)61 353296 Fax: +353 (0)61 353352 Email: info@horsevet.ie Web: horsevet.ie

EMERGENCY CARE

Guidelines to Follow During Equine Emergencies

If you own a horse long enough, sooner or later you are likely to confront a medical emergency. There are several behavioral traits that make horses especially accident prone: one is their instinctive flight-or-fight response; another is their dominance hierarchy – the need to establish the pecking order within a herd; and a third is their natural curiosity. Such behaviours account for many of the cuts, bruises, and abrasions that horses suffer. In fact, lacerations are probably the most common emergency with which horse owners must contend. There are other types of emergencies as well, such as colic, foaling difficulties, acute lameness, seizures and illness. As a horse owner, you must know how to recognize serious problems, respond promptly and take appropriate action while awaiting the arrival of your vet.

RECOGNIZE SIGNS OF DISTRESS

When a horse is cut or bleeding, it's obvious there is a problem. But in cases of colic, illness or a more subtle injury, it may not be as apparent. That's why it's important to know your horse's normal vital signs, including temperature, pulse and respiration (TPR), as well as its normal behaviour patterns. You must be a good observer so that you readily recognize signs of ill health.

WHAT'S NORMAL

There will be individual variations in temperature, pulse and respiration values. Normal ranges for adult horses:

- Pulse rate: 30-42 beats per minute.
- Respiratory rate: 12-20 breaths per minute.
- Rectal temperature: 99.5° to 101.5°F. If the horse's temperature exceeds 102.5°F, contact your vet immediately. Temperatures of over 103°F indicate a serious disorder.
- Capillary refill time (time it takes for colour to return to gum tissue adjacent to teeth after pressing and releasing with your thumb): 2 seconds or less.

OTHER OBSERVATIONS YOU SHOULD NOTE:

- Skin pliability is tested by pinching or folding a flap of neck skin and releasing. It should immediately snap back into place. Failure to do so is evidence of dehydration.
- Colour of the mucous membranes of gums should be pink. Bright red, white, or blue may indicate problems.
- Colour, consistency and volume of faeces and urine should be typical of that individual's usual excretions. Straining or failure to excrete should be noted.
- Signs of distress, anxiety or discomfort.

Ballybrown Veterinary Clinic, Ballybrown, Clarina, Co. Limerick, Ireland.

Tel: +353 (0)61 353296 Fax: +353 (0)61 353352 Email: info@horsevet.ie Web: horsevet.ie

- Lethargy, depression or a horse that's "off feed".
- Presence or absence of gut sounds.
- Evidence of lameness, such as head-bobbing, reluctance to move, odd stance, pain, unwillingness to rise.
- Bleeding, swelling, evidence of pain.
- Seizures, paralysis or "tying up".

ACTION PLAN

Here are some guidelines to help you:

1. Keep your vet's number by the phone.
2. Check that there is an "out of hours" / weekend service provided by your vet.
3. Have a first aid kit stored in a clean, dry place (Make sure all staff members are aware of same).

FIRST AID KITS

First aid kits can be simple or elaborate, but there are some essential items:

- Cotton roll
- Contact bandage
- Gauze pads
- Adhesive bandage/tape
- Scissors
- Rectal Thermometer
- Antiseptic Solution
- Latex Gloves
- Flashlight

EMERGENCY WOUND CARE

The initial steps you take to treat a wound can prevent further damage and speed healing. How you proceed will depend on your individual circumstances, and you must exercise good judgment. The following should be viewed as guidelines:

1. Catch and calm the horse to prevent further injury. Move the horse to a clean, dry stable where possible.
2. Make sure you have a competent person to hold the horse before you attempt to examine the wound.
3. Evaluate the location, depth and severity of the wound.
4. Here are some examples of situations where your vet should be called:
 - a. There appears to be excessive bleeding.
 - b. The entire skin thickness has been penetrated.
 - c. The wound occurs near or over a joint.

Ballybrown Veterinary Clinic, Ballybrown, Clarina, Co. Limerick, Ireland.

Tel: +353 (0)61 353296 Fax: +353 (0)61 353352 Email: info@horsevet.ie Web: horsevet.ie

- d. Any structures underlying the skin are visible.
 - e. A puncture has occurred.
 - f. A severe wound has occurred in the lower leg at or below the knee or hock.
 - g. The wound is severely contaminated.
5. Consult your vet for a recommendation before you attempt to clean the wound or remove debris or penetrating objects, as you may precipitate uncontrolled bleeding or do further damage to the wound. Large, penetrating foreign objects should be stabilized to avoid damaging movement, if possible. Don't put anything on the wound except a compress or cold water.
 6. Stop the bleeding by covering the wound with a sterile, absorbent pad (not cotton), applying firm, steady, even pressure to the wound.
 7. Do not medicate or tranquilize the horse unless specifically directed by your vet. If the horse has suffered severe blood loss or shock, the administration of certain drugs can be life threatening.
 8. If the eye is injured, do not attempt to treat. Await your vet.
 9. If a horse steps on a nail or other sharp object and it remains embedded in the hoof, first clean the hoof. Consult your vet for a recommendation before you remove the nail. If your vet advises, carefully remove the nail to prevent the horse from stepping on it and driving it deeper into the hoof cavity. As you remove it, be sure to mark the exact point and depth of entry with tape and/or marker so the vet can assess the extent of the damage. Apply antiseptic to the wound, and wrap to prevent additional contamination.
 10. All horses being treated for lacerations or puncture wounds will require a tetanus booster.

OTHER EMERGENCIES

There are far too many types of emergencies- from bone fractures, foaling difficulties to colic – to adequately cover them all. However, regardless of the situation, remembering the following points is crucial:

- Keep the horse as calm as possible.
- Move the animal to a clean, safe area where it is unlikely to be injured should it go down.
- Get a competent person to assist you.
- Notify your vet immediately and be prepared to provide specific information about the horse's condition.
- Listen closely and follow your vet's instructions.
- Do not administer drugs, especially tranquilizers or sedatives, unless specifically instructed to do so.

Ballybrown Veterinary Clinic, Ballybrown, Clarina, Co. Limerick, Ireland.

Tel: +353 (0)61 353296 Fax: +353 (0)61 353352 Email: info@horsevet.ie Web: horsevet.ie

SUMMARY

Many accidents can be prevented by taking the time to evaluate your horse's environment and removing potential hazards. Also, assess your management routines to make them safer. Keep Ballybrown Equine Clinic's phone number and first aid kit handy. By acting quickly and promptly, you can minimize the consequences of an injury or illness.