EMERGENCY FIRST AID FOR HORSES

BE PREPARED TO DEAL WITH AN EQUINE EMERGENCY

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The future of veterinary medicine in your community today.
As a horse owner, you must know how to recognize problems, respond promptly and take appropriate action while waiting for the veterinarian to arrive.
TYPES OF EMERGENCIES

- Colic
- Choke
- Lacerations
- Acute Lameness
- Eye Injuries
- Allergic Reactions
- Foaling Complications
RECOGNIZE SIGNS OF DISTRESS

- Decreased appetite
- Lethargy
- Getting up and down or laying down longer than normal
- Single animal off by itself
- Sudden lameness
- Purple or red gum color

- Squinting, tearing or holding the eye closed
- Fever (greater than 102° F)
PLAN AHEAD

Keep phone numbers handy

- Your veterinarian and their after hours information
- Your equine insurance company
- A friend/neighbor who can help you
Horses can be very dangerous when they are injured or panicked!
If you don’t own a trailer, make arrangements ahead of time to borrow one
Know where the nearest veterinary clinic is located and how to get there
Teach your horse how to load before the emergency occurs
FIRST AID KIT

- Gauze pads
- Roll cotton
- Brown gauze
- Adhesive wraps
- Leg wraps
- Scissors
- White tape
- Duct tape
- Stethoscope
- Thermometer
- Hoof pick
- Eye wash
- Antiseptic solution
- Latex gloves
- Flashlight and extra batteries
KNOW WHAT’S NORMAL

- Vital signs
- Attitude
- Appetite
- Manure production

This will make it easier to recognize a problem and relay the information to your veterinarian.
BASIC EXAM

Take the time to gather vital information to relay to your veterinarian such as:

- Temperature
- Heart rate
- Respiratory rate
- Mucous membrane color
- Capillary refill time
- Gut sounds
- Skin tent
- Attitude and appetite
Normal temperature for a horse is **99.5 to 101.5° Fahrenheit** (33.3 to 38.3° Celsius)
Normal resting heart rate is 28-44 bpm (beats per minute)

Left side of the chest

Transverse facial artery
RESPIRATORY RATE

Nostril flare

Stethoscope

Normal respiratory rate is 12-16 bpm (breaths per minute)
The color of the gums should be light pink and they should be moist to the touch.

CRT is < 2 seconds.
GUT SOUNDS

- Four quadrants – should hear sounds in all four
- Increased or decreased may indicate a problem
- Know your horse’s normal sounds!
HYDRATION

Estimate hydration status with the skin pinch test
APPETITE AND ATTITUDE

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SIGNS OF COLIC

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WHAT IS COLIC?

- Any cause of abdominal pain
- Gastrointestinal
  - Most common
- Other body system
  - Respiratory
  - Urinary
  - Reproductive
  - Musculoskeletal
  - Nervous
  - Cardiovascular
WHAT TO DO?

- Call the vet as soon as you suspect colic
  - Can progress quickly
- Perform a brief exam – IF it’s safe
  - Heart rate
  - Gut sounds
  - Gum color
WHAT TO DO???

- Things to tell the vet:
  - Changes in feed or routine
  - Quantity and consistency of recent manure
  - Medical info – deworming, vaccines, pregnancy

- Walk your horse
  - Try to keep from going down, rolling
  - Until the vet arrives

- Do not give any medication unless your vet specifically instructs you to – can mask signs
Can horses reguritate???
(ie. vomit)

No! Horses cannot regurgitate
With certain conditions the stomach may become distended and can rupture if not treated.
COLIC TREATMENT

- Physical exam
- Pass a nasogastric tube
  - Relieve fluid and gas distention to prevent rupture
  - Give fluids, laxatives, electrolytes
- Rectal exam
  - Distention, displacement, impactions
- Abdominocentesis
- Bloodwork
ESOPHAGEAL OBSTRUCTION aka “CHOKE”
SIGNS OF CHOKE

- Coughing and retching
- Extending the neck
- Large amounts of nasal discharge containing food and saliva
- May be able to feel the obstruction
Horses are obligate nasal breathers – they have to breathe through their nose, so even when they are choking they can breathe.

(Choke is still an emergency though!)
WHAT SHOULD I DO?

- Call your veterinarian immediately!
- If left untreated can lead to
  - Aspiration pneumonia
  - Rupture of the esophagus
UNTIL THE VET ARRIVES...

- Remove all food and water
- Keep the horse calm
- Try to keep his head lowered
- Sometimes obstruction will pass on its own
Wounds & Bleeding
Wounds that need immediate veterinary attention

- Excessive bleeding
- Puncture wounds
- Deep lacerations
- Wounds at or near joints or tendons
- Foreign body penetrations
- Severely contaminated wounds
Blood squirting or flowing in a steady stream from a wound needs to be controlled.

Hold a sterile pad or clean towel to the wound and apply steady, firm pressure.

Apply a pressure bandage.
FOREIGN BODY PENETRATIONS

- If possible, LEAVE impaled objects in place!
- Try to stabilize the penetrating object
- Removing the object may cause further damage or bleeding
“STREET NAIL”
SIGN OF AN EYE PROBLEM

An eye injury may be indicated by any of the following:

- Excess tear production
- Eye looks cloudy
- Mucous discharge
- Holding the eye closed
- Light sensitivity
- Swelling around the eye or eyelids
- Laceration of the eyelid
WHAT TO DO???

- Call your vet!
- Do NOT attempt to treat an eye injury or instill any medication
- Wait for your veterinarian
- Try to prevent the horse from rubbing the eye
SUDDEN LAMENESS
CAUSES OF LAMENESS

- Hoof Abscess
  *Most common cause!*

- Fractures
CAUSES OF LAMENESS

- Laminitis (founder)
- Tendon Injuries
TRIVIA QUESTION

What is this tool called and what is it used for?

A hoof tester, to see where the foot is sore.
ALLERGIC REACTIONS
CAUSES & SYMPTOMS

• Caused by
  ○ Drug reaction
  ○ Insects
  ○ Bee sting
  ○ Snake bite

• Symptoms
  ○ Swelling of face, muzzle or throat
  ○ Noisy and/or labored breathing
  ○ Hives
  ○ Itchiness
FOALING EMERGENCIES
FOALING

- Problems are rare, but usually serious
- Ideally the mare should be attended when she foals so problems can be identified quickly
STAGES OF FOALING

Stage 1: 2-5 hours, restless, pacing down and getting up, sweating, urination. Water breaks.

Stage 2: 5-15 min. after water breaks - amnion, forefeet then nose appear. Mare lays down and begins having contractions.

If > 20-30 min before delivery, provide assistance.

Stage 3: 15-90 min. after delivery, expulsion of placenta. If > 2 hrs get assistance.
THE 1, 2, 3 of FOALING

A NORMAL FOALING:

Foal should stand in 1 hour

Foal should nurse in 2 hours

Mare should pass afterbirth within 3 hours
DANGER SIGNS

Notify your veterinarian immediately if:

- The foal seems depressed or lethargic
- Temperature $> 102^\circ$ F
- Increased or labored breathing
- Straining to urinate or defecate
- Signs of colic
- Yellow around the eyes or gums
- Swollen or painful joints
- Swollen or painful umbilicus
- Diarrhea
VETERINARY EXAM

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ENVIRONMENT
ENVIRONMENT

- Take time to evaluate & remove potential hazards
By knowing what is normal for your horse and acting promptly when something is abnormal, you can help to minimize the impact of illness or injury.
QUESTIONS?