



Diarrhoea

Diarrhoea in horses

Diarrhoea is a common ailment in adult horses which is mostly innocuous but in very rare cases can be fatal and therefore must be taken seriously and investigated by your veterinary surgeon. There has been more recent research looking at the microbiome of the horse's intestine and hopefully this will shed light on the cause of some of the cases where a diagnosis is never reached. Only 30 percent of cases in one study had a definitive cause diagnosed.



Biosecurity

Biosecurity should always be considered, particularly if there are any immunocompromised people involved in the care of the animal as some causes of diarrhoea in the horse can transmit to humans.

Classes of diarrhoea

Simplistically, diarrhoea can be broken down into two main groups:

- Idiopathic (unknown cause)
- Acute colitis

This list is not exhaustive and your vet will be able to guide you further on each cause as required.



Idiopathic diarrhoea

It is often reported that horses have a free water phase of faecal expulsion. There is no clear cause behind this, although speculation surrounding fibre digestion in the colon has been put forward. Changing the diet can help these clinical signs with an improvement in the dietary fibre being helpful. Ideally, you should ask your vet to run blood work to ensure no other disease is ongoing and a faecal analysis should be performed to rule out any infectious components. Sand enteropathies are location dependant but can lead to either chronic or acute diarrhoea depending on the severity of the sand accumulation. Faecal analysis for sand can be helpful but to get a definitive diagnosis radiographs of your horse's abdomen are required. Horses will often present with diarrhoea after being moved onto fresh green grass. Normally this should resolve within 24hrs especially if moved off grass and back onto their normal diet. The faeces will often be very green and watery and often horses will suffer from this every spring.



Kings Bounty Equine Practice Client Fact Sheet

Acute colitis

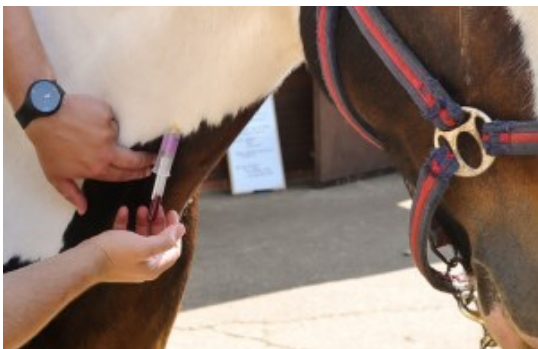
These are often the most severe cases and can be fatal. Horses will often present with severe, sudden onset watery diarrhoea and will be dull, lethargic and often have a high temperature. Immediate veterinary attention is required and cases often require referral to an equine hospital. Possible causes can include: antibiotic induced diarrhoea, salmonellosis, red worm and clostridial overgrowth or upset of the microbiome within the colon (eg following a period of stress or colic). Salmonella and clostridial diseases can infect humans and care should be taken if either of these are diagnosed.

Diagnostics

In all cases of diarrhoea a full blood panel should be run to assess if there are any abnormalities that would necessitate further intervention from your vet.

They may also take a faecal analysis to run:

- Worm egg count
- Sand: Faecal analysis for sand is notoriously inaccurate as often it will remain in the colon without passing into the faeces or can pass through with no accumulation within the colon, therefore radiographs should be taken
- Assessment for bacterial infections



Treatment

The treatment of the diarrhoea will be dependant on the diagnosed cause. In many cases it might be as simple as dietary modification and time whilst other more serious forms will require hospitalisation and intensive care. This is especially important in severe cases where the horse becomes dehydrated and requires intensive intravenous fluid therapy.



To ensure that your horse receives the best medical care it is advisable to speak to your vet as soon as your horse develops diarrhoea.