

## Fact Sheet

# Diarrhoea in the Horse

### Diarrhoea in horses

Diarrhoea is a common condition in horses of all ages and is characterised by loose, watery droppings. It can vary in severity, and while most cases of diarrhoea are mild and innocuous, it can be associated with a range of complications and can even be life-threatening. It is therefore important to speak to your veterinary surgeon if your horse presents with signs of diarrhoea.



### What are the clinical signs?

Clinical signs can vary from being mild and self-limiting, to more severe and even life threatening. In horses that develop diarrhoea, it is important to look out for additional signs such as loss of appetite, dullness, increased temperature, weight loss, colic signs or dehydration (for example sunken eyes, tacky gums, skin tenting). If any of these signs are noted, or if diarrhoea is severe or last more than a couple days, then it is important to contact your vet immediately. Complications that can be associated with diarrhoea include dehydration, electrolyte imbalances, endotoxaemia, colic and laminitis.

### What causes diarrhoea?

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### Diagnostics

Whilst establishing a diagnosis of diarrhoea is typically straightforward, determining a specific underlying cause can be more challenging. In fact, the number of horses with diarrhoea in which a specific underlying cause is determined is reported to be as low as 10-30%.

Diagnostic techniques commonly used in horses with diarrhoea include blood evaluation, faecal sample analysis, abdominal ultrasound or xrays.

Detection of infectious agents (eg. bacterial or viral infections) is of particular importance and there are several diagnostic tests now available to help identify these cases, allowing more prompt and effective treatment and prevention strategies.

# Diarrhoea in the Horse | Fact Sheet

## Biosecurity

Due to the potential for infectious causes, biosecurity should also be considered. Not only is this important to reduce the risk of spread to other horses, but some infectious causes of diarrhoea in the horse can also transmit to humans. This is particularly important if there are any immunocompromised people involved in the care of the animal.

## Treatment

Treatment of diarrhoea depends on the underlying cause, the severity of disease and on any complications. Some mild cases may be transient and resolve without intervention, or require only dietary adjustment and symptomatic treatment at home. However, severe, acute diarrhoea is a veterinary emergency and hospitalisation and intensive care may be necessary in order to provide appropriate treatment and monitoring. Treatment is generally aimed at rehydration (oral or intravenous depending on severity), electrolyte replacement, anti-inflammatories or pain relief, and targeted therapy (for example worming, dietary modification, treatment of sand). To ensure that your horse receives the best medical care it is advisable to speak to your veterinary surgeon as soon possible.



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This factsheet was created by the VetPartners Equine Team, with assistance from our Marketing Team and Veterinary Regulatory Advisors.

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