

Fact Sheet

Inhaler Use On Horses

Why does my horse need an inhaler or nebuliser?

If your horse has been diagnosed with equine asthma, previously known as Respiratory Airway Obstruction (RAO), Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder (COPD), Summer Pasture Associated Recurrent Airway Obstruction (SPA) or Inflammatory Airway Disease (IAD), your vet may advise using an inhaler to deliver the most appropriate drug directly to the affected tissues of the respiratory system. This can reduce the total drug dose needed, and the effects on the rest of the body – thus reducing potential side effects.



What is equine asthma and how is it diagnosed?

Current theories suggest that this condition is as a result of the lungs hypersensitivity to inhaled antigens causing both allergic and inflammatory responses. The exact cause is still not confirmed, but the most common triggers are mould, dust and endotoxins in hay and straw.

This disease can affect any type of horse, of any gender, although the most commonly affected age group is between 9 and 12 years old. There does appear to be a heritable component of this condition.

Diagnosis of equine asthma can often be made based on the clinical signs and the history but occasionally further tests are needed to confirm the diagnosis.

An endoscope may be used to visualise the upper respiratory tract and the windpipe, and samples can be taken from deeper in the lungs for analysis under a microscope.



What drug types can be delivered via inhalers?

- Glucocorticoids are the most commonly used drugs to suppress inflammation and mucus production
- Bronchodilators encourage the tubes of the respiratory system to widen, and can therefore be used before other drugs to aid their delivery to the respiratory system
- Inflammatory cell stabilising agents can be used to try and prevent equine asthma

How do I give my horse the inhaled drug?

There is a licensed equine inhaler; the Aserve Equihaler. Other options include use of nebulisers e.g. Flexineb or inhalers used in combination with a “spacer device”.

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Strict steps to ensure the effectiveness of inhaler therapy with a spacer device:

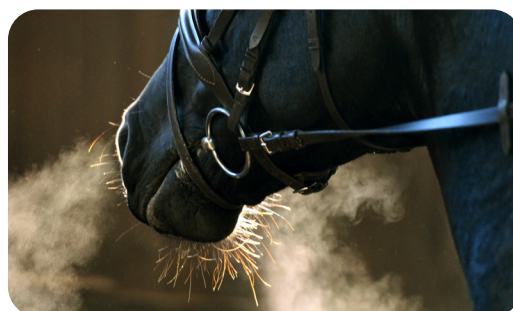
- Warm the inhaler to body temperature before use
- Shake the inhaler for 30 seconds
- Remove the cap from the inhaler
- Waste the first spray if it hasn't been used for more than 12 hours
- Attach the inhaler to the spacer device – ensure that the inhaler is vertical
- Ensure the mask is firmly in position with an airtight seal between it and the spacer device
- Watch the breathing pattern of the horse for a few breaths (this is often easiest if you monitor the valve movement on the spacer device), and actuate the inhaler once just before, or immediately after the horse begins to breathe in
- Allow a full inward breath to take in all of the spray
- If possible obstruct both nostrils after the horse has breathed in to enforce breath-holding for 5-10 seconds, and then allow the horse to breathe normally
- Wait at least 30 seconds before shaking the inhaler again and giving the next spray
- Record the number of doses used so that you know when the inhaler is empty, as it will continue to sound like it is giving the drug. Most inhalers contain 120 sprays
- Your spacer device should be washed weekly in detergent – but DON'T rinse with water afterwards, instead your device should be left to drip dry overnight (don't towel dry)

Dietary and environmental management of equine asthma

Managing these cases is a life-long commitment to reduce some of the triggers for your individual horse.

This may include:

- Using dust-free bedding e.g. paper
- Soaking hay or feeding haylage
- Not storing hay, straw or the muck heap near affected horses
- Only turning out at specific times of the year and into specific fields, in cases of summer associated equine asthma



Despite equine asthma being a chronic condition that will require life-long management and possibly treatment, many horses can continue being ridden to the same level.

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

For further information, please contact your local VetPartners Equine Veterinary Practice on:

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