Common Equine Emergencies and First Aid

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Overview

- What is an emergency?
- Common equine emergencies
  - Colic
  - Fever
  - Wounds
  - Eyes
  - Lameness
  - Neurological
  - Foals
  - More….
- Farm first aid
- When to call the vet

Warning Signs - Subtle

- Anorexia
- Depressed
- Laying down longer than usual
- Off by themselves
- Fever (Temp > 101.5)
- Abnormal gum color (red, purple, white, or yellow)

Warning Signs – More Severe

- Squinting, swollen or tearing eye
- Yellow or green nasal discharge
- Sweating profusely
- Lame

Warning Signs – Most Severe

- Rolling, pawing, colic
- Unable to get up
- Unable to move
- Walking drunk (ataxia)
- Profuse bleeding
- Difficulty breathing (nostril flare, distressed, increased respiratory rate)

Equine Emergencies

- To know when you have an emergency, it is important to understand what is normal and what is NOT normal for the horse
- Behavior, appetite, attitude, gait, and normal physical exam parameters

Normal Adult Horse

- Temperature 99-101.5 F
- Heart rate 28-48 beats/minute
- Respiratory rate 12-24 breaths/minute
- Pink gums
- 6-10 piles of well formed manure per 24 hours

Normal Neonate

- Temperature 99-102F
- HR 80-120
- RR 20-40
- Pink gums
- Nursing 4-6 times per hour
- Fecal output 2-4 piles per day, pasty

Have a PLAN

- Be prepared
- Emergencies are emotional
- Have phone numbers of your vet, insurance information, shipper if necessary
- Financial plan

Be Prepared – First Aid Supplies

- Thermometer
- Stethoscope
- Flashlight
- Phone numbers
- Latex gloves
- Wound dressing
- Shoe pullers and rasp
- Phenylbutazone (“Bute”)
- Cold pack
- Poultice
- Antiseptics (Nolvasan, Chlorahexidine, Betadine)
- Soap
- Scissors
- Eye wash
- Hoof pick and knife
- Bottles of sterile saline
- PVC pipe for splinting

Bandage Materials

- Elastikon
- Vetwrap
- Gauze pads (4x4)
- Roll gauze or kling
- Sheet and roll cotton
- Standing wraps/quilts
- Duct tape

Common Equine Emergencies

- Colic
- Neurological disease
- Wounds
- Lameness
- Eyes
- Fever
- Choke
- Natural disaster

Colic = Abdominal Pain

- Mild signs:

Did not eat all of a meal – Anorexia

Laying down more than normal

Decreased manure production

Signs of Colic

- Pawing
- Stretching Out
- Flank watching
- Abrasions

Signs of Colic

Signs of Colic

- Teeth Grinding
- Excess Salivation

Signs of Colic

- Bloated abdomen

Signs of Colic

- Rolling, getting up and down, thrashing in stall

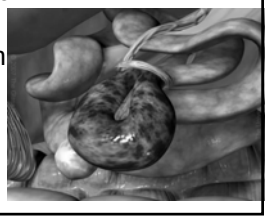
What Causes Colic?

- Many things – mostly “intestinal accidents”
- Most Common Causes:
  - Gas
  - Spasmodic Colic
  - Impaction

90% of colics can be treated on the farm

What Causes Colic?

- Intestinal Dysfunction
  - Gas, spasms, impactions
- Intestinal Accidents
  - Displacements or torsions
  - Strangulations
- Inflammation/Ulceration
  - Colitis, enteritis, gastric ulcers



Gas/Spasmodic Colic

- Sudden changes in diet
  - New hay
  - Lush green pasture
  - To much grain
- Stress?
- Parasites
- Sand

Causes of Impactions

- Feed material impactions
  - Not drinking enough water
  - Water to hot/ to cold/ not available
  - Too much exercise - got dehydrated
  - Traveling – got dehydrated
  - Poor teeth can't chew food well
  - Poor quality hay
- Sand impactions

Cost of Colic

- Medical colic
  - Farm $200 - $600
  - Hospitalized care $ 800- $3000
- Surgical correction
  - $4000 - $7000, depends on problem

DO NOT WAIT TO START TREATMENT

Can we prevent colic?

- Good Management

  High Quality Hay – Very important!
- Regular exercise
- Regular deworming
- Regular dental care
- Intestinal accidents can still happen even under the best management!

What You Can Do

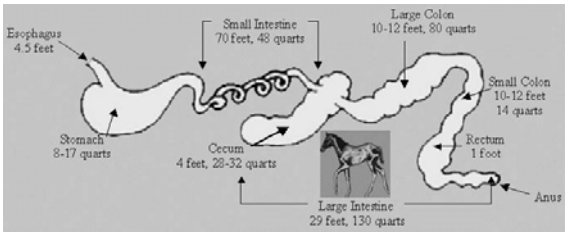
- Remove all feed, but not water
- Take the heart rate and look at the gums
- Call your vet
  - They may recommend giving Banamine
- Walk to prevent injury if down/rolling

Do NOT

- Give more than 1 dose of Banamine without your vet
- Walk the horse to exhaustion
- Try to pass a tube or force feed mineral oil
- Insert a hose rectally to give an enema

Remember

- The equine GI tract is LONG and can be complicated!



Treatment for Colic: Depends on Suspected Cause

- Pain medication
  - Banamine, Buscopan
- Sedatives (xylazine, detomidine, etc)
- Fluid Therapy (oral and/or IV)
- No Feed!
- Laxatives (mineral oil, epsom salts)
- Surgery

Remember with Colic

- Mild GI upsets and colics that require surgery may start out with very similar clinical signs
- Persistent pain is the #1 indicator for exploratory surgery

Neurologic Emergencies

- Vary from head trauma from falls to viral disease like West Nile Virus /EEE/Herpes virus to EPM
- Require immediate veterinary care

Neurological Signs

- Ataxia (abnormal uncoordinated gait)
- Unable to stand up
- Head pressing
- Circling
- Depression
- Trouble swallowing

Ataxia

Neurological Disease

- Any of these clinical signs require a veterinarian for further evaluation
- These signs can progress very quickly in some cases, and early intervention will provide the best outcome

Lacerations and Wounds

- Abrasions
  - Partial-thickness
- Lacerations
  - Full thickness
- Punctures

Superficial wounds can usually be treated on the farm without sutures

Superficial Wounds

- Clean with a disinfectant and water
- Clip the hair to inspect more closely
- Abrasions on limbs may benefit from wraps to decrease swelling

Deep wounds/Lacerations

- May need to be sutured
- Ideally, sutures should be placed within 6-8 hours of the injury
- Clean the wound as much as you can and apply a light bandage
- Do not put any ointments onto a deep wound or laceration, wait for the vet

ALWAYS

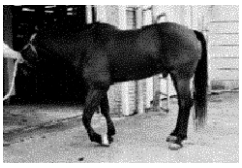
- Call the vet IMMEDIATELY if:
  - Bleeding is profuse, won't stop, and/or is bright red (apply pressure)
  - Injury is over a joint, tendon, or on the bottom of the foot
- Make sure your horse has a current tetanus toxoid booster (within 6 months)

Lameness

- 95% of all lameness occurs in the foot
- Most common problem is a foot abscess
  - Can occur after a sole bruise
  - Must establish drainage to relieve pain
  - Give a pain reliever
- Fracture of the limb can occur
  - Usually severe lameness

Lameness Guidelines

- If lameness is severe and non-weightbearing, require immediate veterinary attention
- Minimize movement and confine if possible
- Phenylbutazone



Causes of non-weightbearing Lameness

- Foot abscess
- Fracture
- Septic joint or tendon sheath
- Laminitis (usually more than one limb affected)

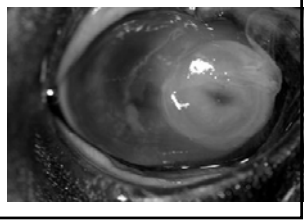
Need veterinary evaluation ASAP!

Eyes

- Should be clear
- Normally no swelling, squinting, tearing, discharge

Eyes

- ANY abnormalities with the eye require immediate veterinary attention
- Eye problems can deteriorate and go bad very rapidly



Fever = Temp >101.5 F

- Fever can be a result of infection, inflammation, viral disease, tumors, immune-mediated diseases, drug administration, heat stress and exhaustion, or severe muscle injury

Fever – What You Can Do

- If the Temp > 103F, hose down with cold water and place in ventilated cool area with fan until further evaluation
- Banamine may be recommended or given by your vet

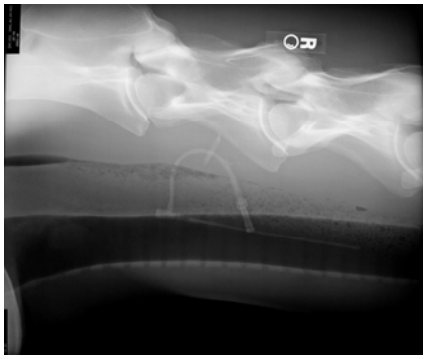
Choke (Esophageal obstruction)

- Occurs when horses eat too fast and food becomes stuck in the esophagus
- Causes:
  - Bolting feed
  - Dental Disease
  - Neurologic conditions causing difficulty swallowing
  - Congenital or acquired esophageal problems

Choke – Clinical Signs

- Frothy green (feed tinged) nasal discharge
- Stretching out neck
- Coughing/distressed
- Gag
- Signs of colic

Choke can lead to…….



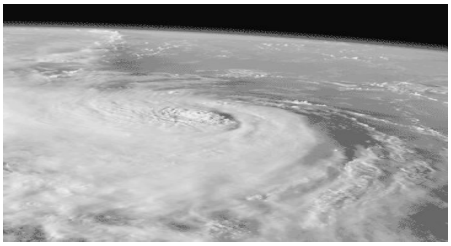
Aspiration Pneumonia

So…if you suspect Choke

- Remove all feed and water – including pasture access!
- Call vet
- Monitor rectal temperature

Many will resolve on their own or with minimal treatment, but some require further therapy

And Last But Never Least…



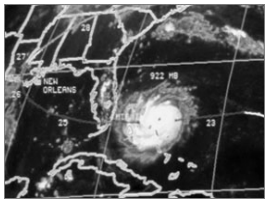
"Preparation through education is less costly than learning through tragedy."

MAX MAYFIELD,
DIRECTOR, NATIONAL HURRICANE CENTER

Lessons from Hurricaine Andrew

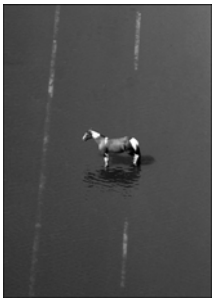
Leading cause of death

- Collapsed barns
- Kidney failure
- Electrocution
- Fencing failure



Natural Disaster Preparation

Written disaster plan
Don't evacuate unless
>72 hours
- get stuck on road



Hurricaine Preparation

<u>Current vaccinations</u>
West Nile Virus
Eastern Equine Encephalitis

Tetanus Toxoid

Keep important Documents Handy

- Coggins test
- Health certificate

Horse Identification

- Take Polaroid picture of each horse
- Label your horse- Luggage tag on halter

Microchip

Brand/Tatoo

Evacuation Plan

- Flooding?
- Severe Winds

When to Travel

- 48 hours before hurricane force winds hit your area
- Winds > 40 mph---DANGEROUS

Lessons from our Past

Keep horses out of barns that are not safe!

Lessons

- Move horses from Flood prone areas

Prepare the Farm

- Store all loose items
- Jump Standards, cups
- Become dangerous projectiles in high wind

Have Water Available

- 12-20 gallons horse/day
- Generator for Well/ Fuel
- Large Garbage Cans with liners

Electricity

- Turn off power to barn
- Do not put horses in a pasture with power lines

Who Can Help?

- Each County
- Emergency Support Function
  "ESF-17"

IC---reports ---State Vet

- VETS
- VMAT (Veterinary Medical Assist. Team)
- DART

In Summary: For Emergencies

- Be prepared – First Aid Kit
- Have a plan
- Phone numbers available
- Stay calm
- Educate clients/ Utilize your veterinarian

Any Questions?

Please Join Us at the Vet School!

- Spring Equine Lecture Series – 7 pm
  - February 26th
  - March 19th
  - May 21st
- Healthy Horses Conference – April 25th
- More information:

www.vetmed.ufl.edu/extension/equine