



A GUIDE TO: EQUINE ASTHMA

WHAT IS EQUINE ASTHMA?



Professional



Caring

Equine asthma is a non-infectious inflammatory airway disease triggered by environmental allergens such as dust found in hay and straw, and pollens in the spring and summer. It has previously been called Recurrent Airway Disease (RAO) or sometimes called Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). It is also referred to as heaves or broken wind. The airway inflammation results in the lower airways in the lungs narrowing due to constriction of muscles and build up of mucus making it harder for your horse to breathe. It typically affects stabled horses and is uncommon in young horses. Horses normally show a gradual worsening in signs, however, acute episodes can occur at any time of year. Equine Asthma can normally be easily controlled with management changes and either oral, nebulised or aerosolized medication (similar to human inhalers).

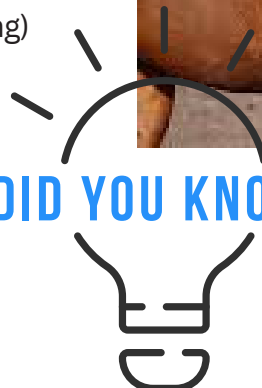
SIGNS YOUR HORSE MAY HAVE ASTHMA

- Coughing (may only be when exercised or after feeding)
- Noisy breathing (wheezing)
- Fast breathing rate (look at the flank and see how many times in a minute your horse breathes, should be between 8-20)
- Using abdominal muscles to assist breathing (flank & abdomen markedly moves in and out with breathing)
- Nostrils flaring.



Studies suggest that up to 14% of horses in the UK suffer from severe equine asthma, and that a larger percentage, up to 80%, may experience a mild to moderate form

DID YOU KNOW?





TREATMENT & PREVENTION



HOW IS EQUINE ASTHMA DIAGNOSED?

The clinical signs of asthma may be classic, and further testing following initial veterinary examination may not be required. However, in more subtle cases, or when all of the signs are not obvious, testing will usually involve endoscopic examination of the airways (a small camera is inserted via the nostrils into the trachea) and then sampling of the material in the airway. This will help rule out an infection, and also ensure that the correct diagnosis has been made.

HOW TO MANAGE EQUINE ASTHMA?

Once a diagnosis is made, a management plan can be provided by your veterinary surgeon. Many horses will not need any medication once the initial signs are controlled if management changes to minimize the amount of dust and mould in the environment can be made. Some of these include:

- Dust free bedding – replace straw with alternatives such as newspaper or dust extracted shavings.
- Haylage or steamed/soaked hay – steaming hay using commercially available steamers has been shown to be the most effective way of lowering numbers of mould spores and dust. Soaking the hay can prevent dust and allergens being released into the air when your horse eats.
- Turn out – even in the colder weather, turning horses out for as much of the day as possible gives them a break from the allergens present in the stable. If possible the horse should live outside all the time.
 - In horses with pollen allergies, bringing in during the day can be beneficial to give some respite from pollens at pasture

If your horse has not improved with these changes alone, medication can be considered in consultation with your vet.

MEDICAL TREATMENT

Bronchodilators – these drugs open up the airways which become narrow with the disease. This allows more air to get in and out of the lungs.

Steroids – may be considered in more severe cases. These drugs prevent the horse's immune system from over-reacting to allergens

Aerosolized/nebulised medications – these can be used to give your horse certain medications ensuring that they reach the lungs where they are most needed. These can come in the form of devices that cover one nostril, or masks that cover both nostrils.