

Equine Summer Health Tips

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Summer is almost universally a busy time for horses and their owners, be it with horse shows, trail riding, cuttings, roping or rodeos. Here are a few tips to keep in mind to ensure summer stays fun for both you and your horse.

Remember hydration. On average, horses require 5 gallons of water per day for maintenance needs. When they're working hard in hot weather, this can easily double or triple. It's a good idea to bring water from home when you're traveling, as some horses are picky about the taste of unfamiliar water and won't drink well. Another trick is to get your horse used to drinking water flavored with a little apple juice or other flavoring that will mask any unfamiliar taste. If a horse is exhausted or very hot, offer water one gallon at a time every 15 minutes until the horse has his fill to avoid intestinal cramps from consuming too much cold water too quickly. Electrolytes can also be helpful in encouraging adequate water consumption and replacing losses from sweat. Talk to your vet about how much to use and frequency of use.

Remember sun protection. Horses sunburn too! Horses with a lot of pink around their muzzles or eyes frequently suffer from sunburn at our high altitude. Human sunscreen is generally safe for use on horses. Long term UV exposure can also predispose to cancer around the eyes in horses with pink skin in that area, so a flymask is a great idea.

Trailer safety. During travel, a horse must shift its weight with the motion of the trailer. The energy expended is almost equal to walking, so an 8 hour trailer ride is as much work as an 8 hour trail ride. Don't expect your horse to arrive fresh and ready to go after a long trailer ride; it's better to arrive the night before or at least leave a few hours to recuperate.

Infectious disease. Many horse events involve crowding of large numbers of horses into small areas or use of common water sources. These are ideal conditions for the spread of diseases. Respiratory bugs like influenza can be passed by aerosolization of virus particles and travel over 10 feet to infect another horse, so avoiding nose to nose contact is not effective in all cases. Some diseases can also be passed from apparently healthy "typhoid Mary" carriers to your horse too. Talk with your vet to develop an appropriate, customized vaccination schedule for your individual horse that will protect him/her adequately without unnecessary vaccination.

First Aid. Accidents happen when you're least expecting them, but a little preparation can go a long ways towards a good outcome. Maintain a well-stocked first aid kit in your barn and trailer, as well as a smaller kit to put in your saddle bag for trail rides. Check your supplies every spring and replace anything you've used up or that has expired.