

Ask A Vet: Be Prepared for Emergencies

Sunday, March 22, 2015

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

Last week, our family had an emergency situation with our horse. She had cut her lower leg and we were unable to stop the bleeding. Our veterinarian was able to come right away, but we had no medical supplies with which to administer first aid. What would you recommend we put in our first aid kit in order to be prepared for the next emergency?

Dear Reader,

There are many situations that could be considered an equine emergency. Colic, lacerations, acute lameness, eye injuries, allergic reactions, choke, and foaling emergencies are just a few of these. Being prepared, knowing how to recognize the symptoms and responding promptly can help ensure a good outcome.

First, be prepared. Mentally go through the steps you would take to handle each type of emergency. Have your veterinarian's phone number by each phone. Remember, it is always better to call if you are unsure of what action to take next. Some emergencies require assistance from a neighbor or a friend who is familiar with horses. Speak to them ahead of time and have their phone number ready. Have a plan in place that provides for transportation in case you need to move your equine friend to a referral hospital. Monitor your horses for signs of distress including: decreased appetite, lethargy, lying down more often than normal, single animal off by itself, sudden lameness, squinting or holding the eye closed with excessive tearing, fever of 102°F or greater, and purple or red gums. When you know what is normal for your horse, it is easier to recognize a problem. Get to know your horse's normal heart rate, respiratory rate, and temperature, gut sounds, mucous membrane color, and attitude/appetite so that you can tell your veterinarian if anything is amiss.

A first aid kit for the barn is a great idea. Store it in a clean and dry space, easily accessible. Make sure that all barn users know where it is kept. A second kit can be kept in the trailer with a pared down version for use on the trail. Your equine first aid kit can be as elaborate as you want them to be. Here are a few items to consider:

- Adhesive wrap (vetrap)
- Gauze pads
- Roll cotton
- Leg wraps
- White tape
- Duct tape
- Stethoscope
- Thermometer
- Hoof Pick
- Eye Wash (saline)
- Antibiotic ointment
- Surgical soap
- Scissors

If possible, you will also want to include medications such as Banamine or Phenylbutazone (Bute) as an anti-inflammatory and pain reliever. Both are available in an oral paste form. A triple antibiotic ophthalmic

ointment is not a bad idea for horses with a scratched cornea. Lastly, an antibiotic such as SMZ/TMP tablets or powder can come in handy for open wounds or horses with a fever.

Many emergencies can be prevented with common sense. Take your time with your horse, evaluate his environment and help him avoid situations that may get you both into trouble. When an accident or illness does happen, be prepared to act promptly to help minimize your horses risk.

-Dr. Wade Hammond