

Be Prepared for an Equine Health Emergency

If you own horses long enough, sooner or later you are likely to confront a medical emergency. From lacerations to colic to foaling difficulties, there are many emergencies that a horse owner may encounter. You must know how to recognize serious problems and respond promptly, taking appropriate action while awaiting the arrival of your veterinarian.

Preparation is vital when confronted with a medical emergency. No matter the situation you may face, mentally rehearse the steps you will take to avoid letting panic take control. Follow these guidelines from the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) to help you prepare for an equine emergency:

1. Keep your veterinarian's number by each phone, including how the practitioner can be reached after hours.
2. Consult with your regular veterinarian regarding a back-up or referring veterinarian's number in case you cannot reach your regular veterinarian quickly enough.
3. Know in advance the most direct route to an equine surgery center in case you need to transport the horse.
4. Post the names and phone numbers of nearby friends and neighbors who can assist you in an emergency while you wait for the veterinarian.
5. Prepare a first aid kit and store it in a clean, dry, readily accessible place. Make sure that family members and other barn users know where the kit is. Also keep a first aid kit in your horse trailer or towing vehicle, and a pared-down version to carry on the trail.

First aid kits can be simple or elaborate. Here is a short list of essential items:

- Cotton roll
- Cling wrap
- Gauze pads, in assorted sizes
- Sharp scissors
- Cup or container
- Rectal thermometer with string and clip attached
- Surgical scrub and antiseptic solution
- Latex gloves
- Saline solution
- Stethoscope
- Clippers

Many accidents can be prevented by taking the time to evaluate your horse's environment and removing potential hazards. Mentally rehearse your emergency action plan. In an emergency, time is critical. Don't be concerned with overreacting or annoying your veterinarian. By acting quickly and promptly, you can minimize the consequences of an injury or illness.

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