

5 Equine Health Conditions Every Owner Should Know

Being an equestrian allows you to interact with one of the most majestic animals in the world - horses. It also comes with an immense responsibility to care for a horse and learn how to keep it healthy by preventing illnesses and others.

There are many zoonotic conditions that can affect horses due to them being outdoor animals that graze, making them prone to coming into contact with microbes. While it might not always be possible to prevent certain health conditions, the right management, monitoring, and treatment can go a long way to ensure a horse remains healthy.

Here are five equine health conditions every owner should know:



1. Equine Protozoal Myeloencephalitis (EPM)

This neurological health condition in horses can be challenging to identify because it shares many of the same symptoms as other illnesses. Furthermore, the symptoms can vary from horse to horse and depend on the severity and progression of the disease and which hemisphere of the brain or spine it develops.

EPM is transferred to horses via a parasite found in the feces of an opossum when it eats contaminated feed. The parasite can then make its way to the brain to cause neurological symptoms. These include spasticity, muscle atrophy, seizures, numbness, and limpness in the head (drooping or tilting head).

Fortunately, [treatment of EPM in horses](#) shows high success rates as nearly 80% can make a full recovery when promptly taken to a vet for hyper-intensive care and supplied with the right combination of FDA-approved medication.

2. Mud Fever

Mud fever is a skin health condition that can affect a horse's lower legs if exposed to wet, muddy, and humid conditions for too long. In this case, dampness can soften the horse's skin, so when mud rubs against it, bacteria gain easier entry and cause skin conditions. These include scabs with a whitish mucus, broken skin hair loss, swelling, and matted hair.

To prevent this, owners can ensure horses are kept in dry conditions and are monitored more often during rainy winter months. Furthermore, when the horse's legs come into contact with moisture, be sure to thoroughly dry the legs afterward. Luckily Mud Fever can be treated and managed by an owner with disinfectants, cleaning, and scab removal.

3. Colic

Most horses are susceptible to colic at some point, so it's a common health condition that needs awareness. It affects the horse's digestive system and abdomen which can be caused by a [parasite infection](#) when grazing. This then affects its drinking and eating habits and fecal composition. Symptoms include increased heart rate, gnawing at their belly, and lying down or rolling to reduce pain.

Horse owners can lower the risk of colic by making sure horses have a constant and steady supply of fresh water and a variety of pastures. This should also include regular dental checkups at least every six months. It's also suggested that horses be fed as far from the ground as possible to reduce the chances of ingesting sand that could bother their gut. A vet can administer anti-inflammatory and pain relief medication to a horse as a treatment option.

4. Laminitis

When the soft tissue structure within a horse's hoof becomes inflamed, it may lead to Laminitis, also known as Founder. It's most often caused by incorrect feeding that can also make the horse overweight among many other factors. To lower the risk, owners should keep the horse on a balanced diet that doesn't contain too many carb-rich foods.

Laminitis can be a life-threatening and crippling disease that causes lameness and a chronic condition if not taken care of as soon as possible. Therefore, owners should remain aware of signs such as bruising around the sole or uncommon rings in the hoof, hesitant gaiting, increased digital pulse in the feet, and standing on one leg to shift pressure on toes and back feet. Vets can then treat the horse with a diet, antibiotics, box rest, and foot-supported shoes.

5. Arthritis

Just like most heavy-mass animals that are highly active with their limbs, horses are also prone to getting arthritis. Just like with humans, aging, weight, genetics, and activities that place strain on the joints are contributing factors to horses getting arthritis. This disease develops when inflammation of the joint tissue causes damage and worn-down cartilage.

A horse with arthritis will have similar symptoms that humans get such as stiffness, pain, swollen joints in the legs, reduced motility, and warm or hot joints. Once a horse has arthritis, it will need to be retired to manage the symptoms. This is especially for older horses that have carried out intensive labor for many years. To minimize a [horse's onset of arthritis](#), allow it to warm up and cool off during exercise and keep it comfortable walking on softer ground for most of its life.

Conclusion

The equine health conditions that every owner should know about consist of common diseases that can be prevented, basic care, and the like. Keeping your horse healthy consists of food and water management, checkups, and keeping horses in comfortable dry and soft environments.

Furthermore, most of these conditions can be treated if they do occur when owners contact a vet swiftly. In the end, a horse can maintain good health with attentive care and awareness of the above diseases.