

Crum Equine Winter Newsletter

December 2010

Winter Colic

Colic signs can be different during cold weather

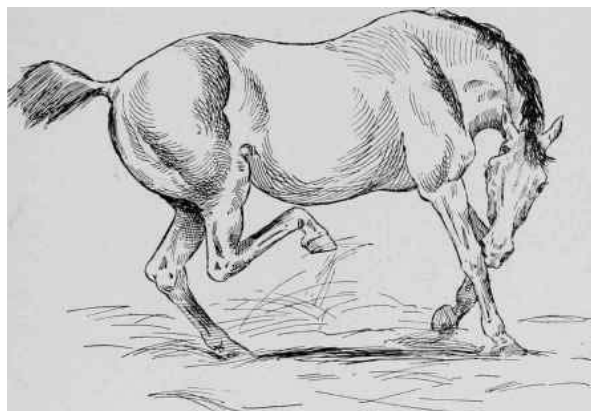
It is often challenging to care for horses during the winter months. Basic horse care takes more effort and more time due to the freezing temperatures. It is very important to remember that cold temperatures can lead to a higher incidence of colic. Colic is a term to describe any type of abdominal discomfort.

The most common type of colic seen during the winter months is impaction colic. Impaction colic is caused by an obstruction of feed material in the digestive tract. There are several areas of the digestive tract that transition from wide to narrow. Those areas of transition are the most common place for feed and manure to accumulate and become lodged. Unlike some other forms of colic (such as displacements or spasmodic colic), impactions do not always cause the horse to be violently painful.

Impaction colic is most often caused by the horse decreasing its water consumption. This can be due to frozen buckets and troughs or an aversion to drinking cold water. One of the most common signs of impaction colic is a horse with less manure than normal in their stall. The horse may also refuse feed, have decreased water consumption, and act depressed or exhibit mild signs of colic.

Impaction colic is better treated as soon as it is noticed. The horse's body will continue to remove fluids from the impaction and make it harder to pass. Horses often respond well to administration of fluids, mineral oil, electrolytes, and a modified diet. Pain relief may also be needed to encourage them to pass the obstruction.

If you notice your horse not drinking water or acting colicky, please call the office for guidance.



Signs of colic: flank watching and kicking at belly

Signs of Colic

Every horse reacts to pain differently. Some of the more common signs of colic include:

pawing, laying down and getting back up frequently, rolling excessively, turning around to look at their abdomen, posturing/stretching out to urinate without passing any urine, holding the tail in the air or passing gas, pale or dry mucous membranes (gums), refusal to eat feed, decreased manure in the stall, flipping the upper lip (flehen response), and many more. If you suspect colic, the horse should be monitored closely to determine if veterinary treatment is required.



Sports Medicine, Lameness, Reproduction and Dentistry

Telephone (740) 653-6000

Fax (740) 653-6051

www.crumequine.com

Steps to Prevent Colic

There are some relatively easy steps to follow that can lessen the chances of your horse suffering from winter colic.

1. Try to maintain a consistent exercise or turnout schedule. Keeping the horse moving will help to keep his or her digestive tract functioning properly. Exercise also encourages horses to drink water.
2. Monitor how much manure is produced in any given 24 hour period of time by your horse. This will help you know when something is amiss.
3. Offer plenty of fresh, clean, unfrozen water. Heated water buckets and troughs are a great resource to ensure your horse always has access to water during the cold winter months.
4. Offer warm water daily. Horses often drink more warm water than cold during bouts of cold weather. Offering them a bucket of fresh warm water each day can increase their consumption.
5. If your horse doesn't seem to be drinking enough, add electrolyte powder or Lite Salt to their feed. This will encourage the horse to drink more water. In a pinch, plain table salt can be added to their feed as well.
6. Offer mashes of their pelleted feed. Pelleted feed can be dissolved with warm water to make a mash. Salt can then also be added.
7. Some horses prefer flavored water. You can add electrolyte powder or powdered Gatorade to a bucket of water to see if that increases consumption. Be sure to offer a bucket of plain water as well.

Crum Equine Veterinary Service
(740) 653-6000

Parasite Considerations

Parasites within the digestive tract can also play a role in causing signs of colic in a horse. Be sure your horse was dewormed in the late fall after the first frost. Performing a fecal egg count is a great way to determine how large your horse's parasite burden is. Fecal egg counts can be performed at Crum Equine Veterinary Service's office. The results are usually available to you within a few days. After performing a fecal egg count, one of our veterinarians can give you advice for the upcoming year's deworming schedule. We will soon have a new collection system for performing fecal egg counts; ask the veterinarian for a container at your next farm visit. Sample containers are also available at the office for pickup Monday through Friday 9:00 am to 4:30 pm. After collecting a small amount of manure for testing, the sample can be returned to the office or given to a veterinarian at the farm for testing.



Dental Health

During the winter and early spring is a great time to have your horse's teeth checked to determine if routine dental care is needed. The average horse will need to have its teeth floated (filing to remove the sharp enamel points) once per year. Good dental health encourages better maintenance of weight, better behavior in the bridle, and better performance overall. The veterinarians can check your horse's teeth at a routine appointment and then discuss the recommendations for continued care. Please call the office to set up an appointment.