



**ANIMAL CARE HOSPITAL, 8565 Hwy 64, Somerville, TN 38068, (901) 466-9224**

## **Equine Update**

12 December, 2002

### **Colic:**

This word is accompanied by fear in most horse owners. What is colic, what are the signs, what should you do, can you prevent it? The word "colic" simply means "Gut Pain." Colic can be caused by several problems (Ulcers, Intestinal Parasites, Grass Impaction, GI Irritants, Displaced or Twisted Bowel); however, most of cases of colic that I see are Grass Impactions secondary to dehydration. The clinical signs of colic vary from not eating and drinking, to nudging or pawing at the flank, to lying down, to rolling. If you think your horse is colicing, *immediate veterinary examination is advised*. Most cases of colic are minor, requiring only medical treatment and dietary management to resolve; however, in severe cases rapid diagnosis and treatment can dictate the life or death outcome of the case.

What should you do until the veterinarian arrives? My general recommendation is to keep the horse from rolling. I am not concerned if the horse lies down, and I believe that walking the horse distracts both the patient and the owner. I would suggest against over exerting the horse. I have examined colicing horses that were ridden or worked into a froth to keep the horse from lying down. This resulted in having to let the horse cool down before examination. I do not recommend self medicating a colicing horse; however, if you (your trainer or neighbor) have a little bit of everything in your drug box, *do not give a colicing horse any drugs (e.g., Banamine or Bute) until you have taken its temperature and heart rate*. Record the dose and time of administration of any treatments and advise the veterinarian upon arrival. Anti-inflammatory drugs will change the clinical appearance of the colicing horse and could cause the veterinarian to misdiagnose the case.

We don't really know why horses colic, but several studies have revealed associated factors.

1. Horses with Intestinal Parasite do colic and die in Fayette County. Deworm Regularly, every 2-3 months and rotate products!
2. Digestion starts in the mouth. Horses with bad teeth or mouth disease have a greater incidence of colic. Dental floating is part of basic health care.
3. Stabled, meal-fed horses are more likely to colic than horses that graze pasture 12+ hours per day.
4. Horses are 9 times more likely to colic after a change in diet. This includes hay changes.
5. Horses that have changed stabling conditions within 2 weeks.
6. Horses that have had a recent change in activity.

To decrease the risk of colic, avoid the risk factors above. Horses need gradual changes in their lifestyles over a 2 week period. If you look at the last 3 factors above, a horse changing stables is at the greatest risk of colicing for around 2 weeks after transport. I also believe horses need to drink water often, frequently, and regularly, as I will discuss below.

### **Winterize your Horse:**

Most horses will adapt to the Midsouth winter without consequence; however, there are steps that owners should take to prevent problems. Most of the colics, that I see during the late fall and winter, are grass impactions caused by dehydration. With the Midsouth's rollercoaster weather changes, a cold snap can stop a horse from drinking for a day (Nobody craves cold drinks on cold wet days!) which can cause the dry roughage in his colon to get stuck. This cycle can be easily broken heating your water tank and feeding 2 oz of loose horse mineral daily. Tank heaters and loose mineral mix are both available at the Farm Supply. I prefer loose mineral to blocks because you can mix it with the grain ration and control who is actually eating the mineral. I personally use the Purina 12/12 Horse Mineral because it is formulated for horses. General Purpose Livestock Minerals are usually formulated for cattle, and a horse is not a cow. Also read the label on the mineral. Salt (NaCl) is salt, even if just enough iron is mixed into it to turn it red. As a rule of thumb, the cheaper the mineral mix, the more salt you are buying. If you want salt, buy the "mineral" that I labeled 98% salt on the label. Salt mixes do not contain the correct amounts of trace minerals, but mineral mixes do contain enough salt.

Horses should be fed quality hay (or Pasture) as the base of their diet, at least 11lb. (dry matter basis) per 100lbs. body weight per day. They should have access to forage throughout the day since meal feeding is a predisposing factor for colic. Horses on winter pasture (Fescue, Rye, Wheat) should be weaned onto these forages to prevent founder. Last year's *stored* hay can be fed as a nutritional source of protein, energy, and fiber; however, you will need to supplement vitamins since these leach out over time. *Weathered round bales are not a source of nutrition*, but are a good source of botulism and fungal toxins. It only takes 3 good rains to devoid hay of most of its nutrients. I do not understand why people store square bales in a barn and leave round bales in the pasture. The shape of the package should not change what is inside nor how we care for it. Hay is a crop just like beans or corn. It must be grown correctly, harvested correctly, and stored correctly. Buy your hay from farmers who grow grass as a crop rather than those that view hay as a way of clearing a field. If you feed round bales (I do) simply cover them until they are fed. Plastic and cinder blocks are inexpensive and are available at all lumberyards.

Horses should be fed grain supplements to maintain body condition based on their performance use and Energy expenditure. *This first statement implies that some horses do not require supplementation*. Unless your horse is undergoing serious daily training or is pregnant, you should not be feeding grain as a protein source. Feed a grain mix formulated for the

needs of your horse, not just a General Livestock Mix. Just because Granddaddy did it does not make it right today, and per pound of nutritional value, oats are the most expensive feed on the market. As a general rule of thumb, horses are fed 1lb. of grain per 100lbs. body weight per day. Supplements should be divided into multiple feedings throughout the day, and when starting or changing grains, increase the feed amount ½lb per week.

"To Blanket or Not": I get asked this question regularly this time of year, and the following is *my* opinion. Most pasture horses are exposed to the elements, grow their own coat, and do not need a blanket, provided they are in good body condition. My horses fit into this group and are blanketed only when a major cold front is moving through. Our horses have run-in sheds, but usually prefer to stand in the freezing rain. I do believe that horses should have cover available, and TN law actually requires it. On the other hand, old horses, sick horses, and horses that are clipped or that are kept in heated barns (usually show horses and mares on lights), probably should be blanketed when turned out on freezing days so that their energy is not expended shivering.

Finally, since we have had frosty weather to remove bot flies, all horses should be dewormed with an Ivermectin based dewormer to clear bot larvae from the horse. This includes horses on Strongid C since this product is not intended to prevent bot infestation.

### West Niles Virus Update:

As most of you know, the West Nile Virus began to infect the Midsouth equine population this fall. Tennessee's first case of the year was diagnosed on 22 July and as of 20 November, 141 cases have been reported with a fatality rate of approximately 1/3. Forty-one (41) of Tennessee's Ninty-five (95) counties have reported cases, but the Midsouth has been hit hardest in Shelby (33 cases, 9 deaths), Tipton (14, 3), Fayette (9, 5), and Haywood (5, 1) counties. The virus has also moved rapidly across the west with Nebraska reporting the most cases this year to date (1096). No horses on the western coast have been infected. I suspect that few migrating birds cross the Rockies.

Preventative measures remain the same. Please refer to our West Nile Virus Update, dated 12 August 2002 (copies are available at ACH), for recommendations. Vaccination is strongly recommended.

### Coggins Testing:

I am receiving a significant number of inquiries about Coggins Testing. The Coggins Test (developed by Dr. Leroy Coggins) tests for Equine Infectious Anemia (Swamp Fever). This viral disease is basically Horse AIDS and is transmitted mainly by biting insects (Horse Flies). There is no cure for this economically devastating disease; therefore, in an effort to remove this virus from the US equine population, leaders in horse industry lobbied the USDA to implement the current Test and Cull Program. It is interesting to me that opponents to this program always state that this disease is someone else's problem when Tennessee, Arkansas, and Mississippi consistently rank in the top 10 states with reported cases. It should also be noted that this virus is in Fayette County.

#### Tennessee State Law requires

1. a negative Coggins Test within 6 months prior to the Transfer of Ownership of any Equid (Horse, Donkey, Mule, Zebra). *This testing is the responsibility of the seller.*
2. a negative Coggins Test within 12 months on every Equid "assembled under different ownership." *The owner of each Equid is responsible for testing his horses. The owner of the premise or manager of the assembly is responsible to ensure all horses meet this requirement, to remove any horse without a current Coggins Test, and to make records available for inspection by enforcement officials.* This requirement conveniently covers all stables, shows, and events.
3. Exceptions to these rules include:
  - A. Equids less than 6 months of age in the company of their negative dams.
  - B. Equids confined at an Approved Livestock Market with results pending.

Interstate Travel: A Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (Health Certificate is valid for 30 days.) and a Coggins Test are required. Coggins testing requirements are determined by each state you are traveling into or through and are listed below. *Be advised that requirements change. Have us check if you are moving a horse into an unfamiliar state or out of the country.*

6 months: CA, MA, ME, MI, MT, NV, NH, OR, SC, & WA.

9 months: OH.

1 year: All states not listed above.

### ★★★ During January, ACH will run Coggins Tests for

**\$15 per horse at the Clinic,**

**\$15 per horse on Farms with 10 or more horses (no Farm Call within 20 miles),**

**\$15 per horse (+ Farm Call) on the Farm with 5-9 horses,**

**\$20 per horse (+Farm Call) on Farms with less than 5 horses.**

★★★ Effective 1 January 2003, the turn around for results will be 2-3 weeks. Our local lab has doubled the test fee; therefore, we will be shipping blood to the State Lab to reduce costs. If you require a **Rush Coggins Test** within 1 week the fee will be **\$50.00**. Please plan ahead!

★★★ Effective 1 February 2003, the price for Coggins Testing will increase to **\$23.00**.

♥ Please call **Animal Care Hospital** if you have any questions or concerns! Have a **Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!**♥