



Ark Vet Centre

Equine Newsletter

November 2024



Welcome to the November newsletter, with the dark nights and mornings firmly here it feels like winter is definitely upon us. This usually marks a quieter time of year for some of you with your horses and ponies. Often it can be a tricky time of year for those of you with older horses, with winter a real struggle

for a lot of these horses. Usually a combination of the weather, a lack of grass and poor teeth can cause your horse to lose weight or struggle to maintain condition over the winter. Now is a good time before we get too far into the winter for some of these horses to have a check up to ensure they are in the best health possible. If you are concerned about your horse and would like them to be checked over, or if you would just like to have a discussion with your vet about their diet, or anything else then please get in touch and we would be happy to help. Over the next couple of newsletters we will discuss some of the more common health complaints we tend to see over the winter.

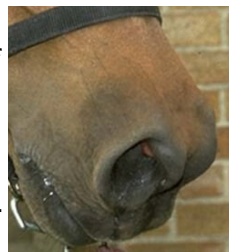
Winter Health Problems

Equine Asthma

Asthma is a chronic inflammatory condition affecting the lower airways, it is non-infectious and is usually triggered by the environment, specifically inhaled particles or allergens such as dust or mould. These allergens trigger airway inflammation causing the airways to narrow and this in turn makes it more difficult for the horse to breathe. Factors such as spending more time stabled and being fed more hay (especially if its dusty) make winter a prime time for symptoms of asthma to become obvious.

Common signs

- * Cough especially during exercise or feeding
- * Nasal discharge, often whitish in colour but can turn more yellow if they develop a secondary bacterial infection on top of the asthma.
- * Increased respiratory rate and effort which often worsens at exercise, sometimes a wheeze can be heard due to constricted airways and the nostrils will flare.
- * Over time a "heave line" can develop along the bottom of the ribs and your horse will be lethargic at exercise.



Diagnosis

Usually the diagnosis can be made just based off the clinical signs and findings on examination. The most obvious of these being a wheeze heard when we listen to their chest. This alongside an increased respiratory rate and effort and a cough are classical signs of asthma. Occasionally if the symptoms are very mild then we may recommend a respiratory scope where we can take samples from the airways which can then be sent to the lab to test for signs of inflammation or infection. This will help us to make a definitive diagnosis of the cause of your horses symptoms.



Treatment and Management

Many horses will not need any medication once the initial signs are controlled if management changes to minimize the amount of dust and mould in the environment can be made. Some of these include:

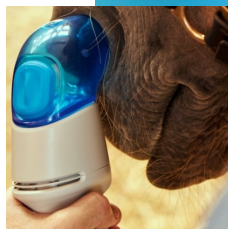
- Dust free bedding
- Haylage or steamed/soaked hay
- Turn out – even in the colder weather, turning horses out for as much of the day as possible gives them a break from the allergens present in the stable. If possible the horse should live out all the time.



We will usually prescribe medications to alleviate the symptoms of asthma for the short term whilst the management changes are implemented with the hope then that horses can either come off the medications or go onto very low doses of them to help manage the asthma in the long term. Unfortunately some even with management changes have to go onto long term meds.



The most commonly prescribed medication is ventipulmin which is a **bronchodilator**. It works by opening up the airways allowing more air to get in and out of the lungs.



Sometimes we will also prescribe **steroids** which help with the underlying inflammation and cough. If horses need long term medications then sometimes we will prescribe inhalers as they tend to be very effective long term as the medication is inhaled straight into the area that requires it and they have fewer side effects.

Asthma is a long term health condition that will need life-long management to keep your horse as symptom free as possible.

