

## BEST PRACTICE

# FOR HORSES IN THE CURRENT HEATWAVE

Dr David Marlin's Animalweb



### AT RISK

- Older horses
- Young horses
- Heavy/large horses
- Dark horses
- Overweight horses
- Those with health issues such as asthma or cardiac disease, Cushings, colic prone horses

All these horses do not cope well in hot weather.



### TRAVEL

- If you HAVE to travel - early morning or late evening are much cooler and there is less chance of traffic delays.
- If travelling in the day soak your horse thoroughly and take spare cold water, portable fans and if necessary, a small generator to run them. Then, if you get stuck and cannot take the horse out, wetting the horse and using the fans will make a huge difference.



### COMPETING

- If you plan to compete in the heat, is your horse prepared? Unless you have been training in the heat for more than 2 weeks your horse will not be acclimatised.
- If the competition is not modified, adjust your riding e.g. slower and/or fewer classes.
- Modify your warm-up. Divide warm-up into shorter periods with cooling inbetween. E.g. 3 x 15 min instead of 45min constant.



### DRINKING

- Horses should always have plain water. Allow unrestricted drinking right up until competition, during breaks in warm-up and immediately after exercise.
- Avoid very cold or very warm water as whilst these do no harm, horses prefer water around 15-25°C.



### SHADE

- Use any shade available.
- Horses may be more comfortable outside in full sun with a breeze and wetted down than inside.



### ELECTROLYTES

- If your horse has not been receiving electrolytes you could start to add an appropriate amount of a balanced electrolyte into the feed.
- Follow manufacturers instructions. DO NOT try to load by adding in larger amounts. This may result in feed refusal or GI upset.

### RAPID COOLING

- Cover as much of the body with as much cool (15-25°C/59°F-77°F) or cold (<15°C/59°F) water as quickly as possible DO NOT stop to scrape!
- The colder the water the less you will have to use and the quicker the horse will cool.
- This should be done continuously for several minutes.
- If the horse is agitated or appears to be recovering the horse can be given a short walk before another period of intensive cooling (for several minutes). This should be continued until the horse's blowing has subsided and or the horse appears more comfortable. This may take 10-15min.
- If shade and or fans are available these can be used but water cooling is the priority.
- Do not rely on cooling blankets/rugs, evaporative coolers or fans as the main means of cooling. These provide comfort NOT rapid cooling.
- Ice packs placed over large veins are ineffective at cooling.
- Cooling rapidly does not increase the risk of colic, muscle damage, kidney damage, laminitis or any other health issues.

### HEAT STROKE / HEAT EXHAUSTION

Signs that your horse may be suffering from the heat include:

- Lethargy
- Panting (faster shallow breathing)
- Nostril flaring
- Increased rectal temperature
- Decreased appetite and thirst
- Dark urine
- Reduced urination
- Reduced performance
- Dark mucous membranes
- Muscle spasms
- "Thumps" (synchronous diaphragmatic flutter)
- Abnormal (irregular) heart rhythm
- Slow recovery after exercise

This is often referred to as heat exhaustion, but if not managed properly it can quickly progress to heat stroke. This may include ataxia (being unsteady on the feet) and/or collapse.

### HOW CAN I TELL IF MY HORSE/PONY IS TOO HOT?

1. Are they hot to touch?
2. Covered in sweat?
3. Showing prominent veins on the skin?
4. Blowing (laboured deep breathing)?
5. Have flared nostrils?
6. Look depressed or overly excited?
7. Unsteady on their feet (ataxic)?

**If you answer YES to any of the above the horse needs rapid cooling!**

**If your horse does go down then continue to cool it aggressively and send for a vet!**

If you are concerned that your horse may have severe heat stroke then it's important that you seek veterinary advice as soon as possible.

For more information: [www.AskAnimalweb.com](http://www.AskAnimalweb.com)



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