

Keeping Your Horse Healthy in the Summer Months

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It's that time of year again! Summer in Florida is notoriously hot and humid and although we people can escape the heat by hiding in air conditioned homes, our horses don't always have that privilege. There are several things about summer in Florida that we need to remember in order to keep our four-legged friends happy and healthy during the summertime.

As the temperature rises, our horses' water needs increase as well. The average horse will consume 10-12 gallons of water a day and that requirement can increase to 15-20 gallons of water in very hot weather. Always make sure your horse has access to plenty of fresh water. An extra pail of water with electrolytes added to it should also be readily available to help your horse replace electrolytes that are lost while sweating. During very hot days, monitor your horse's hydration status by pinching the skin on their neck and counting the seconds it takes to return to normal. A skin tent longer than 2 seconds may be indicative of dehydration. It is important that a horse maintains good hydration or he may become susceptible to developing intestinal impactions.

Typically mature horses do not need to be dewormed during the summer months of May to September as the temperature is too hot to facilitate parasite transmission. At the beginning of the summer season, a fecal egg count should be performed to determine your horse's parasite burden. If the fecal egg count is above 500 eggs per gram, your horse should receive an effective dewormer as recommended by your veterinarian. In order to not contribute to parasite resistance to dewormers and to decrease cost, your horse should not need any further deworming during the summer months unless recommended by your veterinarian.

Many horses that have Recurrent Airway Obstruction (RAO) or "heaves" tend to have flare ups during the summer months, especially if they are maintained on pasture. This is known as summer-associated RAO. Molds, pollens, heat and humidity are believed to be the triggers for pasture associated RAO. Clinical signs of RAO include exercise intolerance, coughing, laborious breathing at rest and nasal discharge. Management of the horse with summer associated RAO include avoidance of pasture turn-out during the summer months, turn-out on a pasture with rye grass, a known low-allergy grass, and stabling in a low-dust environment. Horses that have summer-associated RAO often are sensitive to other allergens such as dust and hay mold, so feeding soaked hay or a complete pelleted feed should also be considered. In the event of an acute episode, your veterinarian can prescribe a steroid and a bronchodilator for a short time while environmental changes are being made.

In addition to the heat of the summer months, there is also plenty of rain. All of the extra rain can cause a wet environment for horses that predispose them to conditions such as rain rot, hoof thrush, white line disease, and seedy toe. In order to prevent these conditions, your horses should always have access to a dry covered area with food and water during sudden downpours. If you notice crusting sores on your horse's skin or if he becomes lame, contact your veterinarian as he may have developed a fungal condition as a result of wet weather.

Although the summer months can be very hot and humid, we must do our best in order to keep our horses comfortable. Do not hesitate to contact your veterinarian if you have any questions concerning management of your horse during the summer.

Contact Brandon Equine Medical Center at 813-643-7177 or email

info@brandonequine.com with any questions regarding this topic.

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