

ISSUE 18 Summer 2023

# Equine NEWS

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Equine

COMPASSION, CARE AND CLINICAL EXCELLENCE

On the cover this Summer are one of the visiting mare and foals currently with us for Artificial Insemination (AI) taken by Practice Manager Jacqui.

Please email [equine@paragonvet.com](mailto:equine@paragonvet.com) if you have any topic suggestions for either the newsletter or Facebook page.

**\*\*EVENT COVER\*\***

The vets have been attending a number of local events to provide veterinary cover over the Spring.

These include the Cumbria Horse Trials and Appleby Harness Racing Events. We have several more fixtures to attend over the next few months.

It is great to see so many of our clients doing well at these events.



**EMERGENCY FOAL MILK AND COLOSTRUM PACKS**

Although hopefully not needed we aim to have a couple of Aintree emergency foal milk tubs and some artificial colostrum in stock at Newbiggin over the breeding season.

If you are having problems and find yourself in need of a tub, even out of hours please call 017684 83789 and speak to the equine team.



**Selina Squarotti - BVMS MRCVS****FOALING**

The mare gestation length averages 342 days, but can be as short as 330 days or as long as 370. The mare should not be allowed to become too fat or too thin, but the diet needs to be adjusted to include the correct amounts of minerals and nutrients for the foal's development. If the mare is shod it is recommended to remove the shoes one month prior to foaling, to reduce the risk of injury to the foal in the case the mare steps on it.

Regarding vaccinations, mares should ideally be vaccinated against Herpes virus on month 5, 7 and 9 of gestation and influenza and tetanus within the last month. If the mare is going to foal in a stud or in a different stable than what she's used to being in, it is important to allow her time to settle and build up immunity to the new environment. The foaling box should be spacious, free of sharp or projecting objects and bedded with clean, good quality deep straw and clean water should be available at all times.

It is difficult to precisely predict when a mare is going to foal. Mares tend to foal at night when it is quiet, and it is therefore important not to disturb them when checking on them. Cameras can be used to observe discretely, without interfering. In the weeks leading up to foaling, the mare's udder will start to develop, and the vulva will gradually lengthen and relax. Closer to foaling, some colostrum will ooze creating wax-like droplets sticking to the tip of the teats, this is called 'waxing-up'. Small samples of early milk can be collected to check for calcium and electrolyte concentration, to determine if the mare is likely to foal that night.



Despite all these signs, some mares give no warnings whatsoever. It is important not to disturb foaling mares and to minimise interference, only acting if there is a problem.

There are three stages of labour. During the first stage, the cervix relaxes, and the foal gets itself into the final birth position. It can last for hours, and the mare is usually restless, will get up and down and show abdominal discomfort. The first stage finishes when the placenta ruptures and the allantoic fluid is released. It is best to contact your veterinarian if the mare is showing excessive, prolonged, or non-productive discomfort or if a red structure appears at the vulva. This is called 'red bag delivery' and happens when the placenta does not rupture.

The second stage starts with the breaking of the placenta and finishes with the birth of the foal. The mare will typically be lying on her side, forcefully contracting her abdomen. In normal presentation, the front feet should appear first, followed by the head. This whole process can be very short and violent in comparison to the first stage. The hind limbs of the foal may remain in the mare longer and the umbilical cord should rupture naturally when the mare stands. It is important not to clamp or cut the umbilical cord prematurely, as a large volume of blood is transferred from the mare to the foal just after birth. When the cord ruptures, the umbilical stump should be treated with disinfectant solution, such as 0.5% chlorhexidine or iodine. If the mare seems to be making little progress, the front feet are not coming out first or if the umbilical cord is not breaking, it is advisable to contact your veterinarian.

The third stage involves the passing of the placenta. when it drops from the mare, it should be carefully examined to make sure that none has been retained inside the mare. The veterinarian should be called if the placenta has not been expelled within 4 hours, as retained placenta can result in uterine infection, laminitis, toxic shock, septicemia and even death of the mare.

The foal usually stands within the first 30 to 60 minutes and should start suckling within 2 hours. Some mares might need to be sedated or restrained to allow the foal to suckle. If both foal and mare are bright and the weather is suitable, they can be turned out in a small paddock as some exercise is beneficial for the mares recovery and helps strengthen the foal.

**\*\*LAMINITIS WATCH\*\***

The recent wet and then warm/ sunny weather has led to rapid grass growth and high sugar content. The grass is richer than usual and the laminitis risk is greater than ever, even if your horse has never had it before.

Make sure you regularly check your horses digital pulses and for warmth in the feet.

Watch their waistline - if they are carrying extra weight they are at even greater risk of laminitis. Don't be afraid to restrict grazing and use muzzles.

The Laminitis app is a great tool to help monitor the grass sugar content in your area, allowing you to plan ahead for particularly high risk days.

If you would like any further guidance please speak to one of the equine team.



**Freya Wood - BVSC MRCVS**

### **ATYPICAL MYOPATHY**



Over the autumn of 2022 and spring of 2023 there has been an apparent huge increase in the number of sycamore seeds and saplings that we have seen on our paddocks.

Atypical myopathy is a severe and commonly fatal muscle disorder that is caused by the toxin hypoglycin A that is found in the seeds and seedlings of sycamore trees, causing the muscle cells to slow or stop producing energy. This affects the muscles of movement but also the heart muscle. This toxin is mainly found in the sycamore tree which is part of the Acer family, which contains 25 species which can be difficult to distinguish between, some of which have also been implicated in this disease. The hypoglycin A toxin is ingested by horses, ponies and donkeys in the seeds that fall onto the pasture in the autumn and the seedlings that appear in the spring. Ingestion can be more common in cooler spring weather where grass growth is slower meaning seedlings protrude above the grass making ingestion more likely.

The toxin causes a myopathy, or muscle disease, with disease usually seen in the spring and autumn, with disease in the summer and winter being uncommon.

Signs of disease include:

- Initial signs include reluctance to move/work and quiet demeanour
- General weakness (struggling to walk, stand or breathe)
- Muscle trembling
- Low hanging head
- Brown or dark red urine (90% of cases)
- Colic signs – pain, sweating, depression and gastrointestinal impaction
- Lethargy
- Fast or laboured breathing
- May be unable to stand



If your horse exhibits any of these signs you must call your vet immediately. This is an emergency! In some cases horses can be found dead on the pasture with no previous signs of disease.

Diagnosis is primarily based on clinical signs and suspicion of ingestion of a plant that may contain hypoglycin A, and signs can appear up to 4 days after ingestion of the toxin so can still occur when the horse has been removed from the affected pasture. Confirmation of diagnosis can take several days so it is vital that treatment is initiated immediately if this disease is suspected based on the clinical signs.

Successful treatment relies on early diagnosis and intervention. Treatment is primarily supportive which may include hospitalisation in a referral centre for intensive care as these horses often require intense intravenous fluids to protect their kidneys. This is a serious disease with a 30-40% survival rate but if horses survive the first few days of treatment they usually will recover completely albeit slowly.

There is no precise quantity of toxin ingested as there seems to be an individual response by horses, possibly due to genetics, diet or previous exposure. Hypoglycin A toxin has been found in the blood of horses that seem to be unaffected, which suggest that some horses are more susceptible than others. These horses that seem unaffected by the toxin for reasons unknown and there is no way to identify these horses, so paddocks may be unsafe despite being grazed for many years.

Toxin levels differ between tree types and between individual trees. The Royal Veterinary College offer testing services to determine if individual plants contain the hypoglycin A toxin with information available on their website. Preparation before the high risk period can help reduce risk, including testing for the presence of the toxin, ensuring supplementary forage is available in the autumn and checking neighbouring areas for potential sources of seeds as they can travel on the wind. If any seeds, leaves or seedlings are seen on the paddock they should be cleared and paddocks checked daily especially during the high risk periods.

To reduce the risk to our horses, ponies and donkeys there are a number of steps we can take. Supplementary forage should be provided during the autumn when grazing is sparse. Fallen sycamore leaves and seeds should be cleared from grazing areas daily in the autumn and paddocks checked in the spring for seedlings daily and the seedlings removed. There are sprays available to kill off the seedlings but studies have found toxin still present in stored seedlings 6-8 months after spraying, so depending on the toxin, left over plant material still may not be safe to be on the pasture. Removal of seedlings is time consuming but is required to make the pasture as safe as possible and it may be more practical to fence off affected areas or find alternative grazing if paddocks are seriously affected. Some seeds can travel 200 yards so neighbouring areas should be checked for plants and seeds that may pose a risk. If found, suspect plants can be tested for the hypoglycin A toxin.

Charlotte Pennington - BVetMed (hons) MRCVS

**CARING FOR HORSES IN HOT WEATHER**



There are a number management steps you can take to help your horses stay comfortable and healthy in the hotter weather.

**WATER** - make sure the water troughs in the field or stable are cleaned out regularly and are working properly. A constant supply of fresh water is essential to prevent dehydration. Water is needed for your horse's digestive system and a lack of water or horses not drinking enough can increase the risk of impaction colic. A 500kg horse can drink up to 30L of water per day, which can increase to 60L during hot weather! Also it is a good idea to make sure there are multiple sources of water available where possible. Soaking hay or feeding soft mashes which have a high water content are additional ways to help keep horses hydrated.

**SHELTER** - shelter from the sun is essential. When there is lack of shelter in the field, stabling during very hot weather may be the best option.

**FLIES** - flies thrive during the warmer weather. Applying a good fly repellent or using fly sheets and masks can help reduce them being a nuisance to your horse. If possible you could turn out overnight and stable during the day, when the flies are more active. Flies love poo, so removing droppings from the field and ensuring that the muck heap is a good distance away from the horses can help to reduce the numbers of flies.

**SUNBURN** - just like us horses can get sunburnt, white horses with pink muzzles are most at risk. Applying sun protection is recommended especially on the pink muzzle area, along with a UV blocking mask if required.



**EXERCISE** - in very hot weather intense exercise where possible should be avoided. If horses are exercised during these periods at a competition or at home, ensure that they are cooled down post exercise with water, plenty of walking and encourage them to drink. Electrolytes can be added to water or feed to restore imbalances caused from excessive sweating. The main thing is to think of is the horse, they all have different levels of tolerance and fitness, if you think they are struggling or there is a risk stop, there will always be another day and another competition.

## **\*\*PARAGON WORMING GUIDANCE\*\***

Our worming leaflets are available to collect from Newbiggin and Dalston receptions. The leaflet that we have developed is aimed at simplifying worming for owners, encouraging worm egg counts and the unnecessary use of wormers which leads to the development of resistance.

Remember to keep dropping those worm egg counts off at Newbiggin and Dalston for testing.



For more information and specific guidance on treating foals see our worming guide.

Thank you to everyone that attended our equine client evening on the 4th April at Newbiggin Village Hall. We had a great evening discussing gastric ulcers, behaviour and spring health issues.

We raised £157.00 on the raffle which was donated between the BEVA Trust and Little Princess Trust.

We are looking to hold another client evening in the autumn. Details are yet to be confirmed so keep a look out on our Social media pages for further details later in the summer.



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