



Spring edition 2021

# Equine Newsletter





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on Facebook:

[facebook.com/don-viewvets](https://facebook.com/don-viewvets)

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# Our news and updates

## Welcome Will Marshall

As some of you may know, our equine vet Mike Burrell has recently retired. We are all very sad to see him go but wish him a wonderful retirement!

With that, we are pleased to announce that Will Marshall, an equine vet from Clyde Vet Group, will be working with us going forward.

Will is a purely equine vet, who has a background working with sport horses, and is a regular treating vet at Ayr and Perth racecourses.

He will be continuing the service that Mike provided, and we are all very excited to welcome him to the team.



## Equine breeding

Are you thinking about breeding from your mare?

Get in touch with us to find out more. Our knowledgeable vets will be on hand to assist you throughout the process. Please contact the practice on 01467 621429.



## Covid-19 update

Please continue to wear a mask at your appointment, even if you have had your covid-19 vaccination jab and stay suitably distanced whenever possible.

This is still a legal requirement and helps stop the spread of the virus.

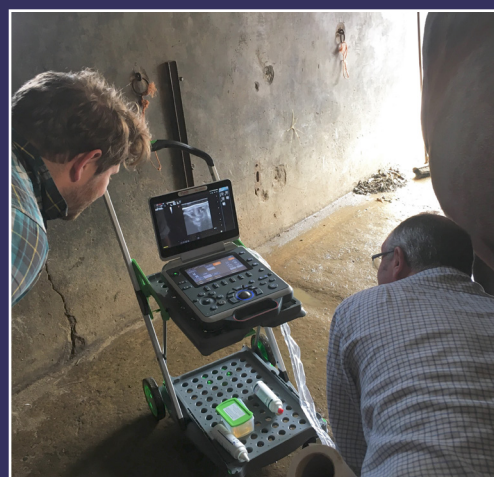
Thank you for your patience and support of the measures in place to ensure you; your horse and our team are safe.

## Our services

- Equine referral service – led by Will Marshall
- Routine horse visits, examinations, vaccinations and dentistry
- 24 hour emergency service
- Lameness investigation and management
- Poor performance investigation
- Dentistry
- Pre purchase examinations
- Reproductive and stud management
- Standing surgery
- Recumbent geldings
- Worm control planning including in house worm egg counts and highly competitive wormer prices

## Our facilities

- Advanced mobile equine digital radiography
- Advanced mobile ultrasonography
- Mobile endoscopy
- In-house laboratory facilities







## Spring Horse Health Checklist

### Spring warning of new grass



Spring is in the air, the flowers are blooming and the trees and paddocks will soon be turning a lovely shade of green. Sadly, it can also mean hidden dangers for your horse.

The warmer weather and rain might cause a change in the soluble sugar content of the grass and so it is important that you manage your horse's intake.

Horses are often fed hay and hard feed over the winter to supplement poor grazing or lack of access to grazing due to poached ground. This change in the contents of new grass can cause upset to the horse's usual intestinal bacterial populations which might lead to colic.

Also, if your horse or pony is coming out of the winter in good body condition, or even looking a little overweight, they might be more at risk of high blood insulin levels when grazing, which could lead to an increased risk of laminitis.

It might also be helpful to monitor the consistency of your horse's faeces and contact your vet if you have any worries.



# Spring Horse Health Checklist

## Here are some other points to consider

Before adjusting your horse's diet for spring, check their body condition. Some may have lost weight over the winter and some may have put on too much.

Ragwort is very poisonous to horses. If eaten it can lead to liver failure. Make sure you remove ALL ragwort from your fields by pulling the whole plant up, including its roots. Make sure you wear gloves.

Flies and midges will be out in force. Horses can be irritated by the bites of many types of fly. Proteins within their saliva can cause a localised allergic reaction within the skin, known as sweet itch.

If you have not ridden or exercised your horse much over the winter months, make sure you bring your horse back in to work slowly. Too much work too soon could lead to injury or pain. Turn to page 7 & 8 for more information.

Check your tack as your horse's body condition may have changed over the winter months. Having an ill-fitting saddle can cause them discomfort and distress. This is why it is vital you get your saddle checked by a qualified saddle fitter on a regular basis. It is recommended that your saddle be checked every three to six months. Horses can change shape throughout the year and having a well fitted saddle can make a huge difference to you and your horse. If you have had your saddle fitted properly but are still finding your horse has some discomfort, don't hesitate to get in touch with us for further investigation.

**With your horse spending more time in the field it's important to check all your fencing and gates and carry out any repairs before they become a safety hazard for itchy horses who like to rub against the rails, other side of the fence grass snatchers or those who enjoy busting their way through damaged fencing!**

**Have you discussed worming control with your vet, and have you submitted a faecal worm egg count? For most premises with adult horses that are under consistently good management a simple strategy of regular worm egg counts through the grazing season with occasional strategic doses of the correct wormer is appropriate. The principle is simple. You have a worm egg count done and if the results are above 200 eggs per gram your vet will advise you that you need to worm your horse and will also tell you which product to use, based upon the core active drug.**

**If the worm count is zero or below 200 eggs per gram then you do nothing more except to repeat the process, ideally a total of four times per year through the grazing season.**







## \*\*\*Laminitis alert\*\*\*

**Please be aware of the risk of laminitis at this time of year.**

The recent warmer weather and rain will bring about the growth of lush spring grass and so it is vital that you manage your horse's intake.

Spring grass is high in sugars called fructans and can induce laminitis if eaten in large amounts.

Laminitis is a painful and potentially devastating disease that causes pathological changes in the laminae of the feet and in severe cases may result in long lasting, crippling changes.

Prompt veterinary treatment and appropriate management are essential to reduce this disease's long-term effects. Many people will own or work with horses all their lives and never encounter laminitis. However, when it does occur it can be heartbreaking.

Laminitis is inflammation of the laminae, and is caused by damage to the bond between the pedal bone (coffin bone/P3) and the hoof wall. This bond comprises of the sensitive laminae (on the bone side) interdigitating with the insensitive laminae (on the hoof side).

Watch that your horse does not become overweight. You should carefully monitor your horse's diet.

Restrict their grass intake where necessary by strip grazing, using electric tape or using a muzzle.

The classical signs of laminitis are easily recognised and include:

- Weight shifting
- Reluctance to move
- Rocking back onto the heels and increase in hoof wall
- Temperature

Worryingly, the development phase of laminitis will have been well under way for up to 40 hours before any clinical signs are seen. As your horse begins to show clinical signs it is said to be entering the acute stage.

If you do see any of these clinical signs it is imperative to contact your vet as soon as possible. The sooner the progression of this disease can be stopped the greater the likelihood that your horse will return to athletic function.



**If you are at all worried, please contact your vet – PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE!**



## Is your horse up to date?

Equine influenza is a viral infection that occurs every year in the UK. As most horses are vaccinated outbreaks of disease are fortunately not very common in most years. However, outbreaks do still occur in unvaccinated horses and, on occasions, vaccinated horses may also show mild signs of the disease. If your horse has not been vaccinated in the last six to 12 months we would therefore urge you to arrange for it to be done – not only to protect your own horse, but also to minimise the chances of the virus spreading through the equine population.

Tetanus is a very serious disease caused by a toxin from the bacterium *Clostridium tetani* and usually results in the death of the affected horse. The organism may be present in the intestine and faeces of healthy horses and spores from the bacteria survive for long periods in the environment, especially the soil. Horses, and other species, are therefore at constant risk but tetanus vaccination is highly effective in preventing disease and therefore clinical cases are rare. Protection afforded by the tetanus vaccine lasts for at least two to three years so if your horse is not up to date we would urge you to phone the practice to arrange a vaccination.



## New rules now apply to equine exports



Did you know that since Britain has left the European Union, there are a number of changes with regards to travelling a horse to the EU.

If you are planning on travelling your horse to the EU and would like more information, please use the following link:

[gov.uk/guidance/export-horses-and-ponies-special-rules](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/export-horses-and-ponies-special-rules)



# Getting back on-board

If you are planning to bring your horse back into work after time off during lockdown it pays to be prepared and to take things slowly, not just for safety sake but for your horse's health and athletic longevity too.

## More haste less speed

You will undoubtedly be excited about getting back on board but remember that your horse has been happily chilling in the field with his friends. They may not share your enthusiasm and their grass belly and lack of muscle tone will mean that they are not in the best shape for instant work either!

Lack of muscle and extra weight mean extra pressure on joints, tendons, ligaments, respiratory and cardiovascular systems, so it's crucial to take things slowly and build fitness gradually, over six to eight weeks.

## New shoes

If you turned your horse away without shoes you will need to check the state of their feet and organise a visit from your farrier. Depending on the quality of your horse's hooves and the ground on which you are planning to ride you will probably need at least a pair of front shoes. Every horse is different so it's best to have a chat with your farrier to devise the most suitable plan.

## Teeth

If your horse has missed a dental check-up during lockdown it's a good idea to try and book an appointment with your vet or Equine Dental Technician, as soon as you can. This way you will know that your horse is comfortable in his mouth before you start to ramp up the exercise.

## Walking in hand

If your horse is safe and sensible to lead, walking in hand could be a good first step for both of you.

Remember to wear a hat and gloves and use a bridle for control.

Walking round the arena several times on each rein, or round the field will help to build the first steps of fitness and can be a good way to re-establish your routine and working relationship with your horse.





## Warming up and cooling down

As you intensify your exercise programme remember to allow time for proper warm up and cool down sessions to help reduce the risk of injury. Warming up will help you both prepare mentally for the session ahead, as well as gradually building heart rate and oxygen flow and engage muscles. Cooling down will allow the heart rate to return gradually to normal and reduce the risk of inflammation in the muscles.

## Knowing your horse

Being alert to your horse's usual behaviour will help you to spot any problems as you progress. Resistance, napping, bucking, rearing, favouring one lead over the other or persistently changing leads in canter, unsettled head carriage, tail swishing or clamping are some of the signs that your horse may be struggling or in pain.

If you are worried it's important to speak to your vet to discuss next steps.

## The right diet

Overfeeding can result in weight gain and behavioural problems. If your horse needs additional feed beyond grass, hay and a dietary balancer, a low starch high fibre diet will provide slow release energy. Always remember to feed for the actual, rather than the anticipated, workload and don't overestimate how much work you are doing. Make any dietary changes gradually and speak to your vet or call a feed company helpline for advice if you are unsure.

## Rider fitness

It's equally important for us, as riders, to be fit, confident and suited to our horse's size, temperament and ability – this way you will both get the most out of your partnership.

## Getting out and about

Be mindful of the fact that your horse may be more exuberant than usual when you get out and about. Factor in extra time at training sessions or unfamiliar hacks away from home to acclimatise him safely!

## Fit for purpose

Always make sure your horse is fit enough for your planned activities; you both want to have fun and a tired horse is less likely to enjoy the experience and will be more prone to injury. Rebuilding fitness after time off can be immensely satisfying and fun. It gives you a chance to enhance your skills and iron out any problems, ready for when lockdown is lifted and competitions start again.



## In the saddle

The British Horse Society recommends a six to eight week fittening plan:

**Week 1** – 20 minutes of walk work, ideally moving in straight lines on a level surface

**Week 2** – Increase to 30-40 minutes walking

**Week 3** – Continue walk work up to one hour, including hill work

**Week 4** – Introduce short bursts of trot work

**Week 5** – Introduce short schooling sessions. Easier lateral work can be reintroduced, again if appropriate, to help with suppleness and flexibility, and to add some interest into their routine. If appropriate lungeing can be used, but keep the circles big, and lunge for no more than 20 minutes in total.

**Weeks 6-8** – Extend your schooling sessions and introduce canter work. Maintain the hill work and hacking, start to introduce pole work and small fences.

[bhs.org.uk/advice-and-information/horse-care/bringing-your-horse-back-into-work](https://bhs.org.uk/advice-and-information/horse-care/bringing-your-horse-back-into-work)





## Grass sickness in horses

**Equine grass sickness (EGS) can occur at any time of the year but is most often seen between April to July.**

EGS is a disease that was first reported around one hundred years ago. The disease affects mainly grazing horses and currently the cause remains unclear. The disease mainly acts by disrupting the nerves that supply the gastrointestinal tract hence affecting gut motility. However other parts of the general nervous system are also affected.

### What horses are susceptible?

#### Individual risk factors:

- Seems to affect native breeds but there have been many reports in other horse and pony breeds
- Young adults (two to seven years old)

#### Premises risk factors:

- Previous occurrence of cases on the premises
- High soil nitrogen
- Pasture disturbance
- Increased number of horses especially younger animals

#### Management risk factors

- Grazing at pasture – only a few cases have been reported in non-grazing horses
- Recent movement to the premises
- Change of feed (type or quantity) in 14 days prior to disease
- Mechanical removal of faeces (hand removal has been shown to decrease risk of recurrence)
- Frequent use of ivermectin based dewormers



**Climate risk factors:**

- Cool, dry weather
- There is a peak in spring and a smaller peak in autumn - though cases can occur all year round

**What signs will my horse show?**

The disease is a continuum of clinical signs, divided in three categories depending on their severity and duration.

The signs seen in individuals affected is reflective of the degree of dysfunction of the nervous system.

Acute cases have a sudden onset of between 24 and 48 hours, subacute of two to seven days and chronic from seven days onwards.

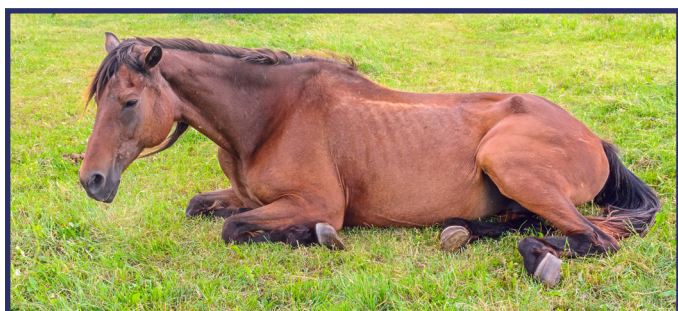
**Horses may show some of the following signs:**

- Colic (mild or severe)
- Dull demeanour
- Muscle tremors
- Sweating
- Difficulty eating
- Excess salivation
- Eyelids appear droopy (ptosis)
- Increased heart rate (tachycardia)
- Firm faecal ball with mucous coating and other signs of slowed gut motility (impactions)

The above signs are more common in acute and subacute cases. Chronic cases tend to show milder signs than acute and subacute initially.

**Other signs can also include:**

- Drying and scab formation in the nostrils (rhinitis sicca)
- Tucked up abdomen
- Penile prolapse



Grass sickness is unfortunately a very frustrating disease and the exact cause remains elusive. Although it poses a serious risk to infected individuals, management practices can be put in place to reduce the occurrence of the disease.

**How can your vet diagnose grass sickness?**

- The diagnosis is commonly presumptive and made upon clinical signs, history and exclusion of other possible diseases
- Definitive diagnosis requires histopathology of a small intestinal biopsy
- Topical administration of phenylephrine drops to the eye may cause temporary reversal of the ptosis seen in some cases

**What treatment options are available?**

- Cases of acute and subacute grass sickness are invariably fatal
  - Supportive care such as intravenous fluids and analgesia can be started before a diagnosis is reached
  - Once a definitive diagnosis is reached then euthanasia is usually recommended
- Cases of chronic grass sickness are reported to have a 40% survival rate. Treating these can be costly as they do require intensive care with recovery in some cases taking between three to eighteen months. Complications are also common in the recovery period

**How do I minimise the chance of my horse getting grass sickness?**

- Try and limit exposure to pastures during high risk periods where previous cases have occurred
- Try and reduce the amount of soil disturbance from methods such as harrowing or mechanical faeces removal
- Encourage removal of faeces by hand
- In heavily grazed or sparse pastures offer supplementary forage
- Avoid sudden changes in diet
- Limit use of ivermectin based wormers
- Minimise the number of horses co-grazing, especially youngsters



## Do you need equine worming advice?

Are you a client of ours and unsure of what worming programme your horse should be on?

Our vets are available to offer you advice on targeted worming.

Please call us on: 01467 621429



## Staff Spotlight with Katie James

BVMS MRCVS  
Veterinary Surgeon



1

Katie joined the team in April 2018 and is one of our Senior Veterinary Surgeons.

4

In her spare time, Katie enjoys exploring the countryside with her Cairn Terrier Polly, or borrowing family members horses to hack out on.

2

Katie's job entails all types of vet work - equine, small animal, farm and pig work. However she tends to do a little more equine and pig work, day to day.

5

Katie's favourite place to be is on a ski slope. She is not particularly fussed where in the world - but ideally not a Scottish slope!

3

Katie feels lucky to be part of such a friendly, hard working team, in such a beautiful part of the country.

6

Did you know Katie has sailed across the Atlantic. Leaving from Nova Scotia, Canada and arriving back in Portsmouth, England.