

Signs that your Horse may be suffering from Colic



What Does a Horse in Pain Look Like?

There are many degrees of pain; from mild to debilitating. The clinical signs you observe will vary. A glassy eye is often an indication that there may be pain. An awake but unresponsive horse may be experiencing pain. Usually the ears are back or loose and drooping to the sides, the lip may be curled and the eyes may be closed. The body may be tense and the horse may show irritation or an anxious expression. Some horses may grind their teeth. Pain can also cause profuse sweating and restlessness and if you measure pulse and respiration, they are generally elevated.

Behavioural Signs:

- Pawing – sometimes with the horse holding his front leg up before pawing
- Restless and getting up and down
- Lying down for prolonged periods of time
- Rolling – will vary depending on pain level (in a normal roll a horse will shake; a colicky horse will not shake after a roll)
- Looking at flank
- Kicking at belly
- Curling of lip
- Stretching – as if wanting to urinate
- Crouching – as if wanting to lie down
- Holding head in an unusual position (neck extended; head rotated)
- May be off-feed

Physical (can use Horse Health Check to check)

- elevated heart rate (32 to 110 beats per minute), the higher the heart rate the more serious the colic is likely to be temperature may be 37.5 to 39.5 degrees Celsius, but it can also be less than normal temperature if the horse is in shock
- respiration is often shallow and rapid, with flared nostrils you may observe a distended abdomen (big belly)
- mucus membranes may be dry, pale and refill may be slower than 1.5 seconds
- there can be dehydration and you may notice the skin fold is greater than 2 seconds to return to the flat position gut sounds may be decreased or increased, and there may be “pinging” or a sound like “water dripping in a cave” when you listen with the stethoscope

- eyes may be glassy or anxious, ears may be drooping out to the sides and the horse may not be responsive

Other:

- manure may change in consistency, colour and odour and may be reduced

If you suspect colic:

- remove from field if the horse is outside
- call the veterinarian or an equine industry professional
- remove all feed, but offer water
- keep the horse warm and relaxed
- hand walk the horse to keep it from rolling and injuring itself
- record the TPR and other health parameters, if you can do so safely, and report these to the veterinarian

Do NOT try to replace the veterinarian and care for this on your own.

Your horse's life is at stake!