The Painful Equine Eye

Signs of a painful eye in the horse are variable and include an increase in tear production or eye discharge. Often the eye may be discoloured, cloudy or red and the horse squints or keeps the eye closed. In some horses these signs can be subtle. Unfortunately a wide variety of conditions can cause your horse’s eye to be painful, and without a detailed examination it is impossible to determine the extent and cause of the problem. Often horses with painful eyes are reluctant to allow such an examination, without sedation and local anaesthetic drops on the surface of the cornea. Fluorescein green dye is often used to show up any damage to surface of the eye (a corneal ulcer), which may be caused by direct trauma to the eye.

The treatment of a painful eye will depend on the underlying cause. Eye drops are often required to be administered regularly, a number of times during the day. Some horses will require antibiotics drops or ointment if an infection is present. Other conditions such as Equine Recurrent Uveitis require intensive use of anti-inflammatory drugs, which will also provide pain relief. Special eye drops are often used in such cases to dilate the pupil, providing additional pain relief and preventing adhesions forming in the eye. The important thing to remember is that eye conditions can be very serious, so you should always contact your vet, even if it’s just for a chat over the phone.

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If you would like more information or would like to let us know that you are bringing in several samples for us to examine then call us on 0131 650 6253.
3 Ways to save money with the Dick Vet Equine Practice
With money being tight for everyone, here are three ways the DVEP can always save you money.

1. Shared Visits - Did you know that you can save big money by having your yard-mates share the vet visit costs. For example we offer a 49% discount when there are two of you and a 65% discount when there are 3 or more of you! That’s a vet visit for as little as £13.75 inc VAT!

2. Mix and Match
Get more than one thing done to your horse per visit. Many people have different dates to vaccinate and do their horses teeth. The two procedures are completely safe to do on the same day! Getting your horses teeth done AND vaccinated on the same day will save you a visit fee!

3. Get in Line
Get all your horses’ treatments done at the same time. For example, get all your horses’ vaccinations done on the same day! The vaccinations your horses receive is quite safe to be given at 6 month intervals. So if you have 3 horses and they are all vaccinated on different dates then you will be paying an extra £79.40. If you have 8 horses the extra cost will be £277.90!

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### Foal Checks

At this time of year some of you are expecting foals. This can be an exciting time! To make things go even smoother follow these simple tips:

1. Get mum and foal checked - The next day it is a very good idea to make sure both are normal and healthy. It doesn’t take very long and could flag up any conditions that need to be addressed or monitored such as cleft palate or bent legs.
2. Get us to give foal a tetanus antitoxin injection - because horses are very sensitive to tetanus toxin we give all newborn foals a tetanus antitoxin. This is not a vaccination but will protect the foal for about 10 weeks or so.
3. Save placenta for us to examine - we must make sure the mare has cleansed properly.
4. Dip foal’s navel - to stop nasty infections the foals navel needs to be dipped in antiseptic. Give us a call for options.
5. Give foal an enema - This will be done when the foal is examined and just makes sure all meconium us passed.
6. If concerned about colostrum (first milk) get your new foal checked for IgG - if low antibody levels are found, your foal is at great risk and may need plasma to boost immunity.

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### Horse Dentistry

Unlike humans, cats and dogs, horses have very long reserve crowns (the portion of the tooth under the gum) which continue to erupt slowly throughout their life until they wear out at approximately 30-40 years.

The rate of eruption is approximately 2-3mm a year and is balanced by the grinding away of the dental surface by abrasive plant materials and silicates in their diet. If dental wear and eruption rates are unequal, teeth will develop overgrowths which can cause painful ulcers in the horse’s mouth. In the wild, horses would normally graze for 16-18 hours a day. Stabling the horse for long periods of time and feeding concentrates (which require far less chewing) vastly decrease the amount of wear to the horse’s teeth and can predispose to overgrowths forming.

Equine maxillary (upper) cheek teeth are also set wider than the mandibular (lower) cheek teeth, such that their occlusal (chewing) surfaces meet at a 10-15° angle. The horse has a one-sided circular motion when chewing food so that the food is ground as the mandibular cheek teeth move inwards over the surface of the opposing maxillary cheek teeth. Reduced hours of chewing leads to reduced wear at the far edges of the teeth allowing overgrowths (enamel points) to develop on the outer aspect of the upper cheek teeth and the inner edge of the lower cheek teeth. These can cause ulceration of the cheeks and tongue respectively.

Common dental problems are sharp enamel overgrowths, displaced teeth, ‘steps’ (overgrown teeth), ‘hooks’ (overgrowths on the first upper cheek teeth and last lower cheek teeth), gaps between teeth (diastema), periodontal disease, caries and fractured teeth. Signs you may notice if your horse has a dental problem are: dropping partially chewed food (quidding), weight loss, hamster-like food pouching in the cheeks, long (more than 2mm) faecal fibre length, bitting problems, head shaking, hanging to one side when ridden, smellly nasal discharge and facial swelling. However, many horses have sharp enamel overgrowths and oral ulceration (fig 1) without showing any obvious signs of pain and so, even if your horse has none of the above signs, dental abnormalities may still be present.

The dental examination should always be performed using a full mouth speculum (gag). Some horses may need sedating to place a gag, particularly for the first time. It is impossible to examine or feel the back of the horse’s mouth safely without one of these gags and so it is an absolute prerequisite for a thorough dental examination.

Many different kinds of motorised and manual rasps are now available, including tungsten carbide chip, solid tungsten carbide and motorised grinding units. To perform a proper float, a good selection of rasps of different sizes and angles should be available. Motorised equipment is useful for removing large dental overgrowths and is much safer than the dental shears used previously. The Dick Vet Equine Practice has two different motorised dental instruments, including a Flexi-float Ultra system.

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The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies

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After Hours Emergency Number
01223 849 835
Scan the code and save to your phone
Normal hours phone
0131 650 6253