

# ASSIGNMENT 216 TASK 1 HANDOUT

## HORSE HEALTH



### Condition of Skin and Coat

The condition of your horse's skin and coat is vital to their overall health, and often a useful indicator of what's going on under the surface. In general, a healthy horse will have a smooth, fine, glossy coat, while the coat of a horse in ill health will lack the lustre and shine derived from skin oils, making it dry and coarse.

A healthy horse will have a shiny coat with the degree of shine depending on the time of year and grooming practices. During colder months, the coat will appear more fluffy and less shiny than during warmer months. Shedding that results in matting or clumping of parts of the hair coat often indicate a fungus infection. Older horses, especially those with ailments such as Cushings Disease, will maintain longer, less shiny coats even during the warm months.

Horses that are heavily infected with a number of internal or external parasites will have a rough, scraggly, dull coat. In some cases, fly or gnat bites will result in scabs or blisters on the skin. Skin should be free from cuts, abrasions, scabs or blisters. Any skin problems should be reported to the manager who may treat the skin problem or contact a vet.

### Behaviour and posture

**Normal behaviour and posture** - A healthy horse is alert and inquisitive, sociable with other horses, and take part in normal herd behaviours such as mutual grooming sessions. Most horses will instinctively run at the first sign of danger, and for this reason horses are generally highly reactive. A normal healthy horse would never live alone by choice. In a herd, horses have a rich and varied social life that includes activities such as play behaviour and mutual grooming behaviour. Horses that live in herds and graze naturally get to exercise their senses frequently. A horse with good posture will generally stand square and be well balanced. His cannon bones should be perpendicular to the ground with the centre of mass behind his elbows. Healthy horses are bright and alert, and interested in other horses, you and their surroundings. They will roll occasionally, especially after being turned out, but always shake the dust off after rolling. A horse that rolls over and over and often looks at its side might be experiencing signs of colic. Contact your veterinarian.

**Abnormal behaviour** - Vices are negative activities that occur due to various causes, including stress, boredom, fear, excess energy, and nervousness.

Cribbing occurs when the horse bites onto a fixed surface (e.g., stall door edge, grain bin, fence rail), arches his neck and sucks in air, making a grunting noise. This causes a release of endorphins which relieves the unpleasant situation. Cribbing can lead to weight loss, poor performance, gastric colic, and excessive tooth wear.

Weaving occurs when the horse stands by the stall door and rhythmically shifts its weight back and forth on its front legs while swinging its head. This is also caused by boredom or excess energy, and can lead to weight loss, poor performance and weakened tendons.

Stall kicking, stall walking, pawing, or digging, and biting over the stall door are also vices that are caused by boredom from being kept in a stable.

Wood chewing, eating bedding, or dirt, and self-mutilation are caused by lack of exercise or boredom. However, nutritional deficiencies could also cause these vices.

### Appetite and water intake

Horses are usually aggressive eaters. When they show less or no interest in feed, it should be a warning sign. Horses spend around 75 percent of their time eating. Provide fresh, clean water at all times, horses drink between 20-50 litres of water per day. Horses are naturally trickle feeds and have a relatively small stomach and therefore eat little and often, grazing for most of the day.

Horses thrive off routines so by feeding at the same time each day, this will positively impact their daily routine. Ensuring horses have good quality forage is crucial for maintaining digestive health and they should be fed hay during winter months or when grazing is inadequate. The No.1 sign of an infectious disease like influenza is a decreased appetite or refuses to eat. Horses with pain in their mouth will usually try to eat but have difficulty. Those with pain in the throat and oesophagus will chew feed but may have difficulty swallowing. Horses that suddenly experience choke or pain while eating may immediately stop and walk away from feed.

## ASSIGNMENT 216 TASK 1 HANDOUT

### **HORSE HEALTH**

#### **Movement**

Horses walk steadily while grazing and also have to travel between where the water is and where feed is. This steady movement helps to keep blood and lymphatic fluid moving around the body. It also helps to wear the hooves down as the horse moves across a variety of terrain ranging from soft and wet to abrasive and dry. Movement is an integral part of the life of a natural living horse so it is very important that domestic horses are kept in a way that encourages movement as much as possible.

#### **Condition of eyes, ears, nose and mouth**

##### **Eyes**

Your horse's eyes should be clear, fully open and clean, not cloudy or discoloured. Any indications of an unusual discharge or a dull glazed appearance should be looked into by your veterinarian. Equine Recurrent Uveitis (ERU) is an autoimmune condition that may start with an eye injury and lead to recurrent episodes of inflammation within the eye. One or both eyes may be affected, with the eye appearing painful (closed or squinting) and a discharge may be present. Ulcers or scratches to the surface of the eye are common and may be caused by scratches from grass seeds or rubbing.

##### **Ears**

Ear infections are uncommon for horses, however they can develop growths on their ears: sarcoids (usually benign skin tumours that can be invasive), tumour's, and aural plaques that look like black or white cauliflower. These growths can be painful, and they can cause an infection if the horse can't clear his ears by shaking his head.

Physical signs of an infection include a discharge or foul odour coming from the ear. Indications from a horse's behaviour can also include shaking his head excessively, tilting his head, and shying away if he is touched near his ears. Horses ears should be free from discharge and lumps and bumps.

##### **Nose**

The nostrils should be clean and free of excessive mucus. However, it is normal for a horse to have a trickle of clear liquid from the nostrils.

Equine sinusitis is the most common disease affecting the paranasal sinuses in horses. Sinusitis is an inflammatory condition that often involves excessive nasal discharge. Horses with sinus diseases can also experience swelling in the face or reduced appetite.

##### **Mouth**

Routine dental care is essential to your horse's in health. Horses with dental problems may show obvious signs, such as pain or irritation, or they may show no noticeable signs at all. That is due to the fact that some horses simply adapt to their discomfort. For this reason, periodic dental examinations are essential. Horses mouths should be free from ulcers and sores.

##### **Appearance of urine and faeces**

Normal horse urine appears colourless, yellow or even cloudy yellow as it is voided. The colour and cloudiness change as the bladder is fully emptied. If the urine appears a red, brown or orange colour as it is being passed that can indicate a significant problem.

Healthy manure should have a glossy shine, indicating normal hydration, and forms neat, somewhat firm, balls. You should be able to break up the manure balls easily. If your horse's manure is dull, dry or hard, he may be dehydrated, and you will need to increase his fluid intake immediately.

#### **Signs of stress or pain that horses may show**

##### **Vocal signs**

Horses are very vocally communicative. The positive whinnies are shorter and overall lower in pitch, while negative whinnies are longer, higher-pitched, and involve ears flicking back and forth, pacing, and even sweating or defecating. The scream is a very rare horse noise, resembling of a roar. When a horse screams, he is typically fighting with another horse. A groan when riding or lunging your horse can mean that he is in pain or discomfort from a bad saddle, too heavy of a rider, or a new source of internal pain or lameness.

## ASSIGNMENT 216 TASK 1 HANDOUT

### HORSE HEALTH

#### Visual signs

Signs of stress in horses may include:

Pacing, Pawing, Sweating, Trembling, Eye Fluttering, Lack of Interest in Food, Tail Swishing, Increased Heart Rate, Fast Breathing, More Frequent Bowel Movements, Flared Nostrils, Shying, Bolting, Pricked Ears, Holding the Head Higher Than Normal, Aggression, Moving the Head Repetitively, Raised Tail

#### The procedure to follow if an animal is found to be sick or injured

- Reporting and recording - Report to the manager immediately if a horse is sick or injured. A vet may need to be contacted in some cases. Record the illness or injury in the animals records and staff communication book so that all staff members are aware. Record any signs or symptoms, especially anything new relating to the illness or injury.
- Monitoring - Keep a close eye on the horse and monitor behaviour, eating and drinking and movement. Check on the sick or injured animal at least every hour and record your findings. Look out for any new symptoms.
- Isolating - Isolate a sick or injured horse in their own stable or paddock to prevent cross-contamination or further injury.
- When to call the vet - Always consult your manager before contacting the vet. Treatment from a vet should never be put off if the horse is injured or sick. If you notice severe signs of stress, weight loss, not moving or laboured breathing you must contact the vet immediately.

#### The records kept to help maintain the health of animals

- Age - Knowing the age of a horse is important as they will have different requirements and will behave differently at certain ages. Horses behaviour changes as they become older so it is important to know the types of behaviour to expect relating to their age.
- Type - The breed of horse should be known and recorded for identification purposes. Also different breeds of horses behave in different ways and have certain characteristics and temperaments.
- Diet - The type of feed and amount should be recorded so that they are fed the correct quantities and food types needed to keep them healthy. It is also useful to see how much they are eating to check they are in good health and are receiving the correct requirements. If a horse has a diet related illness, recording their diet will help to eliminate any foods that maybe making them ill.
- Weight - A horses weight should be recorded to ensure there is no drastic weight gain or weight loss as this could indicate a serious health problem that may need addressing. Weight gain could lead to laminitis and colic and weight loss could be a sign of Cushings.
- Comments - Extra information relating to behaviour, sleeping patterns etc. should be added to provide a better understanding of the animals health.

