



BURNING QUESTIONS!

Trail Blazer readers want to know about

EQUINE HEALTH

Recently, we sent out an invitation to our Trail Blazer readers to hit us with their most pressing questions, in 20 different categories. With over 9,000 questions from our readers, the idea for our dynamic new “Burning Questions” series was born.

In each issue of 2010, we will focus on one topic that our readers have a keen interest in getting great answers from experts!

Questions by Trail Blazer Readers

Answers by Dr. FRANK K. REILLY and DR. CHRIS BESSENT



I have a 12-year-old Morgan gelding who has developed a consistent cough when we trail ride, and my vet says it is heaves. Is this something that can be cured, or do I have to stop riding him?

Heaves is common in many trail horses due to the wide variety of allergens they inhale in different parts of the country and in different seasons. Some studies have shown about 20% of horses have some kind of allergy. Once heaves (aka COPD) is diagnosed, the best way to treat these guys is with low doses of oral steroids (prednisolone) about every other day when you are riding on the trails. Most horses do fine in the pasture, but if going out in a week, start up on the pred four days prior, to get the breathing system all set—try to avoid getting on the trail and then having a problem—prevention by starting prior to the trails helps. I found that bronchodilators such as clenbuterol have little effect, and antihistamines had little effect. Squirt the pred into the mouth two hours prior to a ride.

It is best to avoid straw bedding due to the allergens—use shavings instead. Soak your horse's hay for two to four hours to pull out allergens—a quick hosing of the hay is of little help. Feed hay outside, and keep your horse turned out as much as possible.

- BY FRANK K. REILLY, DVM

When my mare comes in heat, she is just a maniac around other horses. It is getting so bad I am considering selling her. What would cause this? I've heard it can even be a tumor on the ovaries.

Erratic behavior during heat is quite common in mares due to surging sex hormones, which are especially worse in spring. This behavior can be managed well with the use of herbs and/or hormone therapy. Calming, anti-anxiety herbs will make the mare less irritable and reactive and overall will make her more "livable" during the heats. Hormone supplements can also be given to decrease the severity of the heat or to stop the occurrence of heat all together, but they can be quite costly and need to be given daily.

In extreme cases, granulosa-cell tumors can form within the ovaries and may release hormones that make the mare act stud-like and quite aggressive. In this instance, appropriate veterinary testing and care is needed.

- BY CHRIS BESSENT, DVM

I have a horse that suffers from sweet itch. Can you tell me what causes this?

Sweet itch is the allergic reaction to a tiny gnat called *Culicoides* (also known as biting midges and no-see-ums). This reaction causes intense itching, often to the point the horse self-mutilates the skin on a fence post, on the ground (crawling on his belly over rocks) and along the barn. Only a few horses in a herd are usually affected because it is an allergic condition and not contagious. A horse with affected skin will not transmit it to another horse or person. These wounds become infected and are prime territory for other insects to contribute more damage.

To help your horse, you need to decrease your horse's exposure to the *Culicoides* midges, you need to kill the flies that attack with the best fly control you can find, and you need to help the horse from itching. *Culicoides* are not strong fliers, so using fans to physically blow the flies away can be a big help to the horse. It is recommended that you give your horse a bath with an antibacterial shampoo two to three times a week, because urine attracts flies to horses over 30 times more than in other large animals. It has been shown that adding omega oils to your horse's diet will help decrease itchy skin. Fly masks and sheets can help somewhat, if they are well fitting.

- BY FRANK K. REILLY, DVM

MEET OUR HORSE HEALTH EXPERTS

continued next page



Dr. Frank K. Reilly has practiced exclusively equine medicine and surgery for over twenty years. He graduated with three degrees from the University of Illinois. He has worked at race-tracks in Florida, Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania,

including on six world-record holders and multiple track record holder horses. Currently the practice works on show hunters/jumpers, race, event, dressage, and pleasure horses. His latest research projects include 1) Insulin and Laminitis, and 2) Unique Stem Cells/Unique Treatments. Learn more about Dr. Reilly's projects at www.equinemedsur.com.



Chris Bessent, D.V.M., founder of Herbsmith, practices holistic veterinary medicine, utilizing Chinese herbs, acupuncture, food therapy and chiropractic on all animals. After more than a decade of using Chinese herbal combinations in her practice, Dr. Bessent channeled her wealth

of knowledge and experience into Herbsmith, Inc. Dr. Bessent maintains a busy exclusive holistic veterinary practice in Southeastern Wisconsin where she treats horses and dogs on a daily basis. In addition, she teaches the benefits and wisdom of Chinese veterinary medicine through seminars, classes and internships. Learn more about her work at www.herbsmithinc.com

Q My horse always get very loose poop when I take her anywhere in the trailer. How does this affect her health when we get to the ride, and if there anything I can do to help with that?

A Soft manure is often a component of stress. A good probiotic/prebiotic combination can be helpful to maintain balanced gut health. Probiotics are used to naturally develop good bacteria within the gut, and prebiotics are used to provide the nutrition to sustain the "good" bacteria. This is an excellent way to maintain good gut health in the face of trailer stress. There are many good equine probiotic/prebiotic combos on the market.

Once arrived, the horse should have free access to fresh water. Any fluids that are lost in the manure can then be replenished. You may also choose to offer electrolytes to account for those lost in soft manure and to encourage drinking. It is best to provide a second bucket filled with electrolyte water. (Editor's note: For more about using electrolytes and probiotics see article on page 28.)
- BY CHRIS BESSENT, DVM



Q What are the normal ranges for horses pertaining to body functions (i.e., heart rate, pulse, respiration, etc.)?

A The normal temperature of a horse is between 99 and 101 degrees Fahrenheit. The normal resting heart rate is 40 beats per minute. Normal respiratory rate is 8 to 16 breaths per minute. With exercise, both heart rate and respiratory rate will be elevated. Normally, a horse should return to the resting rate within five to ten minutes of ceasing exercise.

The respiratory and heart rate of an unthrifty, thin, overweight or poorly conditioned horse may be higher. Alternatively, the respiratory and heart rate of a very fit or athletic horse will oftentimes be lower.
- BY CHRIS BESSENT, DVM

Q I live in California and the trails we ride in are full of ticks. Is there anything I can do other than remove them, perhaps a vaccine or antiseptic that would help prevent Lyme disease?

A There is no vaccine for horses for Lyme disease. Recent studies are finding more and more species of ticks carry the disease, and Lyme disease is now in every state in the US. So yes, do your best to remove the ticks promptly—they must feed for 24 to 36 hours to be able to transmit the bacteria. If the tick jumped on the horse at 8 a.m. and you see it at 5 p.m. and take it off, this will prevent a problem. But as you know, ticks can get up into the groin or chest and hide—so the key is to spray the horse prior to a ride to repel them and then again after a ride so they will jump off. The key is not to be on a merry-go-round of the antibiotic doxycycline—it is expensive, so avoid the problem with the best fly spray around.
- BY FRANK K. REILLY, DVM

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Q What is the best protocol to test for insulin resistance (IR) in horses?

Insulin peaks in the morning, so test then (same as in people). Previous studies show many horses with this condition are missed if fasted prior or only on hay. You need a small sweet feed "challenge" of about 1 pound for a 1,000-pound horse (1/2 pound for a pony) along with the hay they usually get in the morning.

Once fed, insulin peaks in two hours, so for example, feed at 8 a.m., then test at 10 a.m. The sample is then put in a refrigerator for 30 minutes and spun down and the plasma or serum is harvested and placed into a hard plastic tube and refrigerated again. The sample is sent to Cornell or Michigan State University in a refrigerated pack via Fed Ex—results can be expected in two days after the lab receives the sample. The number to look for is 60 at the Cornell lab and about 420 at the MSU lab—if your horse's number is over this, you have confirmed insulin resistance.

The American College of Endocrinology (for people) now has as its standard a carbo challenge to diagnose insulin resistance, and this is becoming the same protocol for horses. In the past, fasted horses had false low numbers and the case was missed and later the horse would go into laminitis due to not being on a program to protect the feet.

- BY FRANK K. REILLY, DVM

Q How common are ulcers in trail horses?

Gastric ulcers are quite common in horses. Ulcers are caused by either the inappropriate or excess use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (i.e., "bute" or Banamine) or by excessively high grain diets. The signs of an ulcer can be chronic low-grade colic, girthiness during saddling, chronic irritability and/or sensitivity in the withers or girth area.

- BY CHRIS BESSENT, DVM

FOR MORE INFORMATION about the best horse health products,

- Durvet, p. 19
- Equilite, p. 36
- EQyss, p. 3
- Farnam, p. 5,37,47,69,83,85
- Feedmark, p. 29
- Halstrum, p. 92
- Herbsmith, p. 27
- Life Data, p. 30
- Source, Inc., p. 65
- White Haven Farm, p. 31
- Zephyr's Garden, p. 38

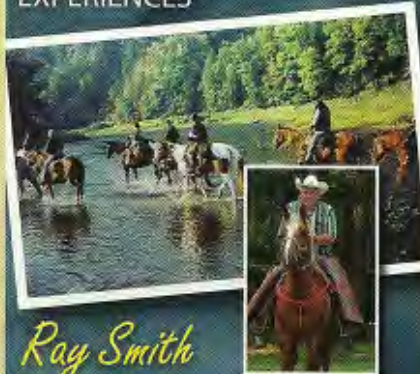


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