



RESPONSIBLE
HORSE OWNER BOOKLET

TAKING ON A NEW HORSE



MSD

Animal Health

INTRODUCTION



Whether you are buying a new horse or taking one out on loan this guide will help you through important topics to consider before and after your horse arrives with you.

This guide is part of a series covering a range of different topics to help you keep your horses healthy.

For more information and to gain access to the rest of the series, please visit our website:

www.healthyhorses.co.uk

or find Keeping Britain's Horses Healthy on Facebook and Instagram.



VETTING A HORSE

Once you've chosen a horse or pony that you would like to buy, before making the final decision, it is sensible to have a pre-purchase veterinary examination performed (vet's certificate or a 'vetting' as it is often known).

www.beva.org.uk
(search: pre-purchase examination)

Getting a horse vetted

Vetting or pre-purchase examinations are often not a significant portion of the final purchase price of a horse and investing in one may save you money, time, effort and heartache in the long run. Before the vetting, you must discuss with the veterinary surgeon that will be doing the examination what type of work you hope the horse will do. If the horse passes the examination then a certificate will be issued by the veterinary surgeon. This certificate can be used for insuring the horse or pony when the sale is completed (see insurance section, page 7).

The five-stage vetting

The five-stage vetting is carried out in accordance with guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and the British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA). At the time of the vetting a blood sample will be taken and sent for storage. This can be analysed in the future to detect substances present in the horse's system at the time of the examination that might have masked any factors affecting the horse's suitability for the intended use.

The five stage test may take a couple hours to complete and someone will need to be available to ride the horse.

A dark stable, a hard level trot up area and a suitable area to work the horse are also required.

Some vets will choose to lunge the horse in addition so facilities and equipment should be made available.

The passport must also be to hand.

Stage 1 – thorough external examination of the horse at rest to check for any signs of injury, illness or abnormality. This will include checking the eyes in a darkened stable, listening to the heart and lungs, thorough inspection of the limbs, the back, the skin and the teeth. Any lumps, bumps or old injuries will be noted along with the horse's conformation and body condition. Your vet will also take note of any behavioural problems (such as weaving or crib biting), however it is important to remember that just because none are seen during the examination doesn't mean that none exist.

Stage 2 – walking and trotting in hand on a hard surface. Looking for signs of lameness and your vet may choose to carry out flexion tests. Lunging on both reins in a tight circle will exaggerate any subtle lameness and may be used additionally if there are concerns.

Stage 3 – strenuous exercise normally under saddle but this can be on the lunge in non-ridden horses. The vet will be able to assess the horse when it has an increased heart and breathing rate and listen for abnormal 'wind' or breathing noises. This stage will also allow assessment of gait at walk trot and canter.

Stage 4 – cooling off period and check for signs of stiffness after exercise.

Stage 5 – trotting in hand again to look for any signs of strains or injuries made evident by the exercise and rest stages. Flexion tests and lunging may be repeated if there are any concerns.

On completion, the vet will give their opinion, as observed on that day, to the prospective buyer as to whether, on the balance of probabilities, the horse will be suitable for the type of work that the buyer requires the horse for. It is not a guarantee of suitability or future health.

There is the possibility of performing a shorter and less detailed examination which includes performing the stage 1 and stage 2 components of the 5 stage vetting. This is called a two-stage vetting and whilst useful will not pick up certain conditions which are only presented after a period of strenuous exercise.



MICROCHIPPING AND PASSPORT REQUIREMENTS



Horse passports

The 'Horse Passports Regulations 2004' came into effect in June 2004 and means that every horse must have its own passport whether or not it is expected to travel.

One of the key purposes is to make sure that horses treated with some specific medicines do not enter the human food chain. The use of passports should reduce the risk that a small but important group of medicines are not banned for use in horses. One such example is phenylbutazone (bute) which is widely used to treat lameness.

There is a declaration within the passport to determine whether the horse can ultimately end up in the human food chain. If the declaration to prevent the horse from entering the human food chain is signed by an owner it cannot be reversed and the horse will never be allowed into the human food chain. A vet will need to see the passport and check the declaration has been signed before giving the horse certain medications. Always make sure you have your horse's passport with you when your horse is examined by the vet even if this is a routine appointment.

Signing to exclude your horse definitively from slaughter for human consumption will mean your horse can receive all medicines, however it will restrict the disposal options at the end of your horse's life.

Microchipping your horse

If a horse has not been previously issued with a passport it will require a microchip before a passport can be issued.

In response to concerns around animal welfare and to prevent abuse, legislation around the microchipping of horses was changed in 2018. Previously only horses born after 1st July 2009 were required to be microchipped, this has now expanded to include all horses (including ponies and donkeys) born before this date. In England this needs to be completed by 1st October 2020, Wales by 12th February 2021, and Scotland by 28th March 2021.

Microchipping means that individual horses can readily be uniquely identified by anyone with an appropriate scanner.

The microchip is no bigger than a grain of rice. It is inserted via a needle into the nuchal ligament of the neck from the left hand side. It is very difficult to remove even under surgical conditions.

The microchip is programmed with a unique number which can be read by a radio scanner. When the microchip is inserted your veterinary surgeon will ask you to fill out a form with all your and your horse's relevant information. This information is then stored on a database along with the microchip number unique to your horse.

Any changes to the status of the horse, such as being euthanased or stolen, should be reported to the passport issuing organisation; the central equine database is then updated within 24 hours. Accurate microchip details help reunite owners with lost and stolen animals with much greater speed.

INSURANCE

Horse insurance

The purpose of obtaining insurance for your horse is to protect you the policy holder against any unexpected physical or financial loss or other unforeseen costs which may arise. With horses this loss may be accidental injury, death, veterinary treatment or injury to third parties. There are different types of policy cover to protect against these different losses and this will be reflected in the cost of the premium. Types of cover include third party insurance, all risks mortality (also known as accidental death), veterinary fee cover and loss of use cover. It is your responsibility to make sure that the cover you have taken out is adequate for your needs and if in doubt you should consult an independent insurance broker before you commit.

Some insurance companies will have a minimum requirement for adequate preventative healthcare such as vaccinations. Make sure you read the policy details and check with them if not clear.

When should I insure?

Depending on the value you are insuring your horse for you may be asked to provide a certificate of examination from an experienced veterinary surgeon. This will take the form of a vetting certificate as previously discussed. It is worth noting that although your horse may have 'passed' the pre-purchase examination by your vet for an intended purpose, it is perfectly possible for the insurance company to make various exclusions of cover due to pre-existing conditions. If there is any doubt it is advisable to obtain the satisfactory cover prior to purchasing the horse.

Horse insurance runs for one year and any renewal forms a separate contract. As such if your horse sustains an injury or illness you have one year's worth of cover for this condition after which exclusions may be placed for future cover. Even if you do not claim for a condition you must disclose all pertinent facts to the insurance company at renewal otherwise your cover may be invalidated.

When and how should you make a claim?

It is your duty as a policy holder to inform the insurance company as soon as possible that your horse has been injured, lost or is suffering from an illness or disease. Once notified, insurance companies may initiate different procedures but they will all ask you to show that you have actually sustained a loss (i.e. documentary evidence of veterinary fees already paid) and they may well ask you and your veterinary surgeon to complete an appropriate claim form. Insurance companies will only cover fees already incurred but should be informed as early as possible if specialist or expensive procedures have been suggested by your vet.

LOANING A HORSE

Considering loaning a horse?

Horses need a lot of your time and dedication, as well as your love and care. Owning and caring for a horse will involve some expenditure that needs to be budgeted for, including, routine feed, livery fees, bedding, equipment, vaccinations, farriery and dental checks to name a few. There's also the possibility of emergency vet care to prepare for. But loaning a horse can be a great first step towards having a horse of your own. Equally, loaning may be a great option for those owners who prefer not to sell their trusted friend despite having less time to look after them or having outgrown them.

For any loan to work well, both parties involved need to agree on their responsibilities and ensure that all eventualities are planned for, particularly what will happen if the loan comes to an end unexpectedly. We strongly recommend that you have a written loan agreement in place, signed by both parties before the loan begins. This will reduce the risk of dispute and protect the owner, the loaner and most importantly the horse. It is normally the person who is loaning the horse who is responsible for all ongoing care costs.



ROUTINE HEALTH CHECKS



Checking for signs of disease

Your veterinary surgeon should carry out an annual health check on your horse. But as owners we can perform regular checks ourselves to ensure that any signs of disease are identified early. In most cases routine checks are second nature and often you will perform them subconsciously every time you ride, groom, feed, bring in or turn out your horse. Here's a handy list of regular checks to make:

- **Skin and coat**
- **Teeth and eating**
- **Eyes, ears, nose**
- **Legs**
- **Appetite, water intake, urination and faecal volume and consistency**
- **Behaviour**
- **Hoof condition including any signs of heat**
- **Temperature, pulse and respiration**
- **Body condition and weight**

If anything appears out of the ordinary then get in touch with your veterinary surgeon who will be able to give you advice.

Knowing the normal values for things such as breathing rate and heart rate in your horse can be very useful in identifying disease early. Every horse is different so you need to know what your own horse's normal range is. It is also best to take these measurements at rest and not immediately after any exercise or stress/excitement. Any change from these normal values could indicate a problem.

What is the normal range of a horse's heart rate?

At rest = 28-44 beats per minute.
At exercise = up to 200 beats per minute.
 The heart rate is measured with a stethoscope or by feeling the pulse in the lower leg or jaw. If the heart or pulse rate is raised at rest this may be a sign that a horse is sick, in pain or stressed.

What is the normal range of a horse's breathing (respiratory) rate?

At rest = 8-14 breaths per minute.
 Breathing rate can be measured with a stethoscope, watching the sideways expansion of the chest or watching the movement of the nostrils. The rate can often be raised when the horse is stressed or sick.

What is a horse's normal body temperature?

Normal temperature = 99.5-101.3°F or 37.5-38.5°C.
 The temperature is taken by inserting the thermometer into the anus of the horse and holding against the side of the rectum. Low readings may be taken if the thermometer is inserted into a ball of faeces by accident. For safety reasons, do not stand directly behind the horse when taking the temperature. It is important to seek advice from your veterinary surgeon if you are inexperienced at this.

WHEN TO CALL THE VET



Knowing when to seek help

The Equine Industry Welfare Guidelines Compendium for Horses, Ponies and Donkeys provides guidance when a veterinary surgeon should be consulted urgently by the owner or person in charge of the horse. Below lists some situations which may need immediate veterinary attention:

- Acute abdominal pain or colic
- Serious injury involving deep wounds, severe haemorrhage, suspected bone fractures or damage to the eyes
- Evidence of straining for more than 30 minutes by a mare due to foal
- Inability to rise or stand
- Inability or reluctance to move
- Severe diarrhoea
- Prolonged/abnormal sweating, high temperature, anxiety, restlessness or loss of appetite
- Any other signs of acute pain or injury
- Respiratory distress
- Wound which is on or near a joint or tendon sheath/bursa
- Acute severe lameness

A veterinary surgeon should be consulted within 48 hours of the owner or person in charge becoming aware of the following conditions:

- **Marked lameness that has not responded to normal first aid treatment**
- **Injury that has not responded to normal first aid treatment**
- **Signs suspicious of strangles or other infectious disease, nasal discharge, raised temperature, enlarged lymph nodes or cough**
- **Sustained loss of appetite**
- **Persistent weight loss**
- **Skin conditions that have not responded to treatment, including saddle sores and girth galls**
- **Other sub-acute illness or injury**

Of course there are many other reasons why you might want to call your vet for assistance and never hesitate to contact them if you have any concerns or questions. This list is a minimum indication of the attention that should be available to animals in distress. Your vet will always be happy to give their advice and if they think an examination is necessary they will arrange this with you.

WHAT SHOULD I DO NOW

- Speak to your vet about a pre-purchase examination before buying a new horse
- Ensure your horse has a passport and remember to take this with you to all veterinary appointments and when you transport the horse
- Get to know what's normal for your horse so that you can recognise early signs of disease
- Call your vet if you have any concerns about the health of your horse
- Ensure you have adequate horse insurance cover to protect against any unforeseen losses and costs
- If you are loaning a horse make sure you have an agreement in place which both parties have signed
- Your vet
- To find a vet in your area findavet.rcvs.org.uk/find-a-vet
- Visit the BHS website for further information on passports and loaning a horse www.bhs.org.uk/advice-and-information/horse-ownership
- Independent insurance brokers

Where can I go for further information?





Further information
is available from:

MSD Animal Health UK Ltd
Walton Manor, Walton
Milton Keynes MK7 7AJ

Tel. 01908 685 685

www.msd-animal-health.co.uk
www.healthyhorses.co.uk

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