

BHS guidelines: keeping horses cool in the heat

The British Horse Society have produced these fantastic [guidelines](#) for keeping horses cool in the current heat wave:

As temperatures soar and we all try desperately to top up our tans, it is important not to forget that it isn't just us people who suffer in the heat.

Many horses will find the current heatwave uncomfortable, but the good news is there is plenty we can do to keep them cool and happy.

Water

The single most important thing is to keep your horse hydrated. Horses can easily consume more than double their normal water intake in hot weather, so be prepared for this. A constant supply of clean and fresh water is essential – water that has been left to stand for too long will become warm and possibly unpalatable.

If horses are out together in the field, make sure that more than one water source is available so that the submissive members of the group aren't prevented from drinking by bullying.

If your horse has been sweating a lot, it might be a good idea to add electrolytes to his feed or water to replace those lost in the sweat. If you do add them to the water make sure the horse doesn't mind the taste, because if it puts him off he may not drink anything at all.

If you are travelling your horse anywhere, take more water with you than you think you will need. Remember some horses are fussy about drinking water away from home, so it could be essential to have a familiar supply.

More importantly, if your vehicle was to break down, you could be stuck at the side of the road for hours waiting for a recovery crew. If this happens in these temperatures the horse would need plenty of water, especially as you can't guarantee there would be any shade for him.

Shelter

Shelter is essential in hot weather; it isn't just for protecting the horse from wind and rain. All horses need to be able to get out of the direct sun and into some shade. In fact, it might be sensible to keep horses stabled through the hottest parts of the day providing their stable remains cool. Inadequately ventilated stables can become uncomfortably hot and stuffy.

If your horse is turned out, a walk-in field shelter provides the best protection from the sun. The shade provided by trees and hedges may provide a good substitute, but remember that the shade will move with the sun so there may be certain times of the day when it isn't accessible to your horse.

Exercise

Not many of us feel like exerting ourselves in this kind of weather and it is the same for our horses. If you are

going to ride, do it in the morning or evening when it is coolest and don't push the horse too hard. They can't be expected to do as much in hot weather as at other times. Overweight horses will suffer more than those in the correct condition – yet another good reason not to let your horse get fat.

Don't forget to wear hi-viz if you are riding on the road. Even in bright sunshine patches of shade can make it difficult for drivers to spot horses on the road.

After riding make sure you cool the horse down properly. Hose the horse down all over with cool water. There are large blood vessels close to the surface in the horse's neck and inner thigh. Concentrating on these will cool the horse more quickly as the water will be able to cool a greater volume of blood. Don't neglect the rest of him, though – it still needs cooling! Many horses will appreciate this as a treat even if they haven't been ridden.

Flies

Flies are another hot weather menace. If you can keep your horse in during the day and out at night then his exposure to flies will be minimised. Thin fly sheets and good insect repellents can help greatly, and remember to take particular care with horses with open wounds or sarcoids. Spraying repellent on the walls of stables and shelters may also be a good idea. Remove droppings frequently from the paddock and stable to avoid attracting flies.

Sun protection

Sun cream isn't just for humans! Remember non-pigmented areas on horses (white markings for example) can burn easily, so sunblock may be needed. Keep a particular eye on grey horses, especially their muzzles and the tips of their ears. If your horse has a thick coat (like a Cushing's sufferer, for example) then he may need a clip to prevent him becoming too uncomfortable.

Heatstroke

If you follow all this advice your horse shouldn't suffer from heatstroke, but it is best to know the signs just in case. These include increased pulse and breathing rate, an irregular heartbeat, dehydration and a raised temperature. The horse may be sweating profusely or may not be sweating at all. If you are concerned that your horse has heatstroke, move him somewhere cool and seek immediate advice from your vet.

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