

# THE 7 MOST IMPORTANT FACTS EVERY HORSE OWNER NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT COLIC

## YOU WILL LEARN

Why prevention is  
better than cure

The most common  
signs to identify colic

When you should  
call your vet

# DID YOU KNOW?

## Colic is the number 1 problem faced by horse owners.

The adage 'Prevention is better than cure' couldn't be more correct when talking about a horse with colic. It can cost you a small fortune to treat, with surgery costing anywhere between \$7,000 and \$15,000 alone.

Colic continues to be classed as the most common equine emergency. This means the chances are incredibly high your horse will experience colic at some point in their life. In this article, we highlight the 7 most important things you need to know to prevent colic.

The horse has the most poorly designed digestive system out of any animal, making them highly susceptible to colic.

### 1 Any horse can get colic, even yours.

Colic is a very broad term that covers anything to do with gastrointestinal upset or pain. There are many causes of colic, and each cause has different treatment options and outcomes.

The horse has the most poorly designed digestive system out of any animal, making them highly susceptible to colic. It doesn't matter whether you have a rising two-year-old, a fit performance horse in its prime or a 29-year-old 'lawnmower' that never leaves your property, your horse can suffer colic if not prevented.



### 2 Sudden feed changes can cause colic.

This is one of the most common causes of colic. With a change in seasons or during drought, you may decide to start feeding your horse, rather than rely on forage alone. Horses being horses, they eat their meal too fast, rather than chew slowly, and the result is a ball of gas in their stomach, which leads to stomach pain.

For some horses, just a slight change in feed can be enough to cause colic. To assist in preventing colic in your horse, it's advised to change their diet gradually. Introduce new feed and hay items slowly over a week or two.

### 3 Poor dental care can cause colic.

Because horses lack digestive enzymes in their mouths, they need to chew their food very well before it enters the stomach to allow the breakdown of food. If your horse has any pain associated with chewing, such as from sharp enamel points or ulcers, they won't chew properly, which can lead to stomach upset.

Likewise, if your horse has teeth missing, preventing your horse from moving its jaw side to side, this will also prevent them from chewing their food. The by-product of poorly chewed food entering the gut is gas, thus colic occurs. Ensure your horse receives routine dental checks at least once annually.

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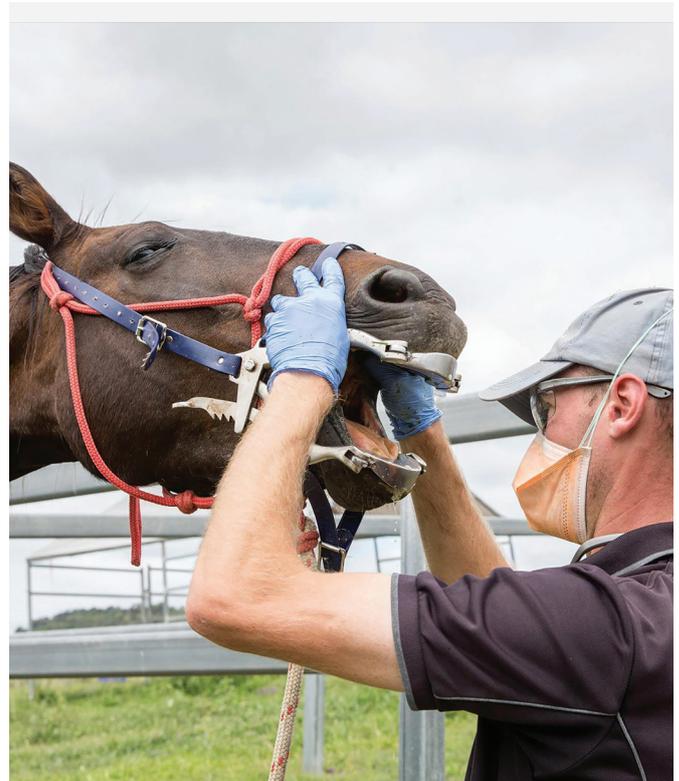
Often, horse owners wait to see if the colic passes. At times it does, but in instances of severe colic the longer you wait, the worse the outcome.

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### 4 Infrequent or under dosing when worming can cause colic.

If you're not regularly worming your horse or underestimating their weight when worming, this can lead to colic. If you're not worming regularly and suddenly worm your horse, you may kill a large number of worms at once, leading to a mass of dead worms in their digestive tract.

Also, if you think your 500kg horse weighs only 300kg, this can lead to drug-resistant worms that continue to cause damage, like inflammation of the intestines. Implement a routine worming program, usually every 8-12 weeks, depending on the products you use on your property.



### 5 Treat early, don't wait and see.

To give your horse the best prospect of overcoming colic, call your vet immediately if you suspect it. Often, horse owners will wait to see if the colic passes. At times it does, but in instances of severe colic, such as gas colic, the longer you wait, the worse the outcome.

We all know what happens to a balloon if you keep blowing it up, it pops. If bacteria in your horse's digestive system keeps producing gas, the intestines will enlarge until they rupture. When veterinary assistance is sought early, we can prevent the gas build-up from worsening. But, if your horse ruptures their intestines, sadly even surgery won't be able to save them.

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## 6 Learn to identify the signs of colic in your horse.

Observe your horse's behaviour on a daily basis. The most common signs of colic are pawing at the ground, looking around at the flank, frequently laying down and getting up, rolling, curling the upper lip, playing in the water trough but not actually drinking, keeping the head to the ground while walking in circles, increased heart rate or breathing rate, excessive sweating around the flanks or shoulders.

The list of signs is endless. In fact, a low grade colic may only be shown by your horse refusing to eat dinner! If your horse is showing any irregular behaviour, take action and call your vet.

## 7 The choice to vaccinate against Hendra Virus

In Australia, the discovery of Hendra Virus and the risk to human life has caused concern in the horse community. The difficulty with Hendra Virus is that colic is one of its signs. Due to health and safety laws, vets are limited by what they can do when horses aren't vaccinated.

It is advisable to ask your local vet what their Hendra policy is. This will allow you time to figure out what you can do if your horse shows signs of colic and whether you want to vaccinate your horse against Hendra Virus to allow all procedures to be performed if, god forbid, your horse develops colic.

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## DR LOUISE COSGROVE

Having spent most of her childhood in the saddle, it was a natural transition into equine veterinary medicine for Louise, founder of Exclusively Equine Veterinary Services and HorseBarn Education. A practicing equine vet, Louise is passionate about empowering horse owners, like you, with a deeper understanding of horse health, so you can give your horse a longer, healthier future.

**If you have any questions regarding your horse, you're welcome to contact me personally.**

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