



## **BEST PRACTICE FOR HORSES IN THE CURRENT HEATWAVE – Dr David Marlin**

### **GENERAL ADVICE**

Avoiding the heat is the best option – ride early morning or late evening!

If you have to travel your horse, early morning or later evening are much cooler and less chance of traffic jams.

If you are travelling in the day wet your horse down thoroughly and take some spare cold water, portable fans and if necessary, a small generator to run them. If you get stuck and cannot take the horse out wetting the horse and using the fans will make a huge difference.

If you are planning to compete in the heat, consider whether your horse is prepared. Unless you have been training in the heat for ~2 weeks your horse will not be full acclimatised. Even with acclimatised horses at Olympics the cross-country is shortened as horses cannot do the same work in the heat as in the cool, even when acclimatised. If the competition is not modified consider that you may have to adjust your riding e.g. slower in endurance and XC, or enter fewer classes.

Modify your warm-up. Divide warm-up into shorter periods and cool in between. E.g. 3 x 15 min instead of 45min constant.

Horse should always have plain water. Allow unrestricted drinking right up until competing, during breaks in warm-up and immediately after exercise. Avoid very cold or very warm water as whilst these do no harm, horses prefer water around 15-25°C.

Use any shade that's available. Horses may be more comfortable outside in full sun with a breeze and wetted down than inside a horsebox or trailer.

If your horse/pony has not been receiving electrolytes you could start to add an appropriate amount of a balanced electrolyte into the feed according to manufacturers instructions but do not try to load by adding in larger amounts. This may result in feed refusal or GI upset if consumed and the majority will be excreted in any case.

### **HOW CAN I TELL IF MY HORSE/PONY IS TOO HOT?**

Horses that are very hot are hot to touch, may be covered in sweat, may have prominent veins on the skin, be blowing (laboured deep breathing), have flared nostrils and may be depressed or overly excited and unsteady on their feet (ataxic). These horses need rapid cooling.

### **COOLING**

Rapid cooling should be done by covering as much of the horses body with as much cool (15-25°C/59°F-77°F) or cold (<15°C/59°F) water as quickly as possible without stopping to scrape. The colder the water the less you will have to use and the quicker the horse will cool. This should be done continuously for at least several minutes. If the horse is agitated or appears to be recovering the horse can then be given a short walk before another period of several minutes intensive cooling.





This should be continued until the horses blowing (deep/laboured breathing) has subsided and or the horse appears more comfortable. This may take 10-15min.

If shade and or fans are available these can be used but water cooling over the horse is the priority.

Do not rely on cooling blankets/rugs, evaporative coolers or fans as the main means of cooling. These provide comfort but NOT rapid cooling. Ice packs placed over large veins are ineffective at cooling.

Cooling rapidly does not increase the risk of colic, muscle damage, kidney damage, laminitis of any other health issues.

Older horses, younger horses, horses with health issues such as asthma or cardiac disease, Cushings, colic prone, heavy/large horses, dark horses and overweight horses do not cope as well in hot weather.

If your horse is uncomfortable in hot weather in the stable or field then spraying them down and leaving the water to evaporate will help keep them cool and can be done every few hours. I promise your horse will not overheat due to insulation by water – this is 100% a myth 😊

### **HEAT STROKE / HEAT EXHAUSTION**

Signs that your horse may be suffering from the heat include:

- Lethargy
- Panting (faster shallow breathing)
- Nostril flaring
- Increased rectal temperature
- Decreased appetite and thirst
- Dark urine
- Reduced urination
- Reduced performance
- Dark mucous membranes
- Muscle spasms
- “Thumps” (synchronous diaphragmatic flutter)
- Abnormal (irregular) heart rhythm
- Slow recovery after exercise

This is often referred to as heat exhaustion, but if not managed properly and quickly can progress to heat stroke. This may include ataxia (being unsteady on the feet) and/or collapse.

If your horse does go down then continue to cool it aggressively and send for a vet! If you are concerned that your horse may have severe heat stroke then it's important that you seek veterinary advice as soon as possible.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION: [www.drdavidmarlin.com](http://www.drdavidmarlin.com)**

