

## **Colic- When is it time to call the veterinarian?!?!?**

Most horse owners have been forced to face the question: “When is it time to call the vet if my horse is colicing?” The answer to this troubling scenario can be a bit confusing so let’s start with the basics and sort this out.

First, “colic” is simply a vague term used to describe abdominal pain. There are many misconceptions of what causes a “colicky horse,” but the truth is just about anything can be the culprit. With the laundry list of potential problems that you could be facing, sorting out the critical from the not so critical is very important.

When determining if your horse simply has an upset stomach, or is facing a life threatening complication there are several parameters that you should watch carefully:

1. **Rolling or laying down**-It is normal for horses to lie down several hours a day and roll occasionally; however, if your horse is laying down and reluctant to rise, or if it is rolling continually it is imperative to seek medical attention quickly.
2. **Gastro-intestinal (GI or gut) sounds**- You should be able to place your ear on both sides of your horses belly in front of the flanks and hear gurgling every 10-20 seconds (if you practice this skill on your horse you can easily become comfortable with what is normal). If you cannot hear GI sounds on both sides or if they have decreased in frequency the problem could be more serious.
3. **Heart rate**- The normal heart rate for a horse is between 24-36 beats per minute. Be extremely cautious if your horse has a heart rate greater than 40 beats/minute. You can easily learn to feel you horse’s pulse by feeling the artery as it runs over the bottom of the

jaw (if you have any problems finding, just ask next time you come in and we will get you squared away).

4. **Lack of appetite**- If your horse is usually excited to eat and is suddenly uninterested, problems could be looming ahead. One common mistake is to feed horses to see if their appetite has returned. If your horse is colicing, withhold all feed until you are certain they feel better.
5. **Fecal output**- The average horse should pass 8-12 piles of feces throughout the day. If you notice a sudden decrease in the amount of feces take heed.

In summary, you know when your horse is not acting normal. Use the guidelines listed above to help you determine if this is a serious problem that needs to be seen by a professional. Remember, the earlier you can identify a serious problem and seek appropriate medical therapy, the better chance your horse has to make it out alive.