

Horse Care

The basics

Owning a horse can be a rewarding and enjoyable experience. Whether a horse is used for pleasure riding, competition or just kept as a pet, a horse can make a wonderful companion.

There are many important responsibilities associated with owning a horse. Owning a horse is a long-term commitment, requiring significant time and effort, and is expensive.

As a horse owner, it is your legal responsibility to make sure that your horse is provided with the basic requirements to keep it healthy and happy. The basic requirements include adequate and appropriate feed, water, shelter, space and exercise, company, health care, and treatment of illness or injury.

Feed

Horses must have access to an adequate amount of good quality feed in the form of roughage (pasture, hay or chaff) to keep them in good body condition. A guide to the amounts of roughage (hay) is 1-2 kg per 100kg of bodyweight.

You may need to supplementary feed a horse that is being worked regularly or if there is not enough pasture and the horse is losing body condition. A salt lick or mineral block can be provided in the paddock. Check with your veterinarian for suitable supplementary feeds – grass clippings and many food scraps are not suitable feed as they may cause a horse to become ill.

Water

Clean water must always be available. A dam or self-filling trough is best. Bath tubs, if used, must be checked daily and re-filled if necessary. Dams and self-filling troughs should also be checked frequently. Buckets are not suitable as a permanent water supply as they can be tipped over. As a guide, a horse may drink 25-45 litres per day in hot weather.

Shelter

Horses need shelter from extremes of sun, wind and rain. Trees or a walk-in shed/ stable make suitable shelter. A waterproof rug can be used to protect the horse from cold weather but must be checked daily to ensure it is not rubbing, slipping off or leaking.

Exercise/space

Horses must have enough space to walk and run, unless they are exercised daily. Stabled horses must have enough space to walk forward, turn around, lie down and roll. Sick horses may need to be confined under the directions of a veterinarian. Tethering of horses is only acceptable for short periods of time and daily supervision and inspection is required. It is important to ensure that there is adequate feed and water, suitable tethering equipment and flat terrain. Horses must not be tethered long-term.

Paddocks

Fences must be kept in good repair to prevent injury and escape. Remove rubbish and weeds regularly to prevent injury to the horse. Care should be taken to remove threats such as loose wire that may cause a horse to be injured by a fence,

Health care

Feet

Have a farrier trim the hooves every 6 to 8 weeks to prevent them chipping or becoming too long and uncomfortable for the horse. Shoes are only needed if the horse is to be ridden on hard or rocky ground.

Teeth

A horse's mouth needs to be checked by a dentist or veterinarian at least annually if it is kept in a paddock. Failure to do so may mean that its teeth become sharp causing pain and mouth injuries which can result in feeding or handling difficulties. Weight loss may be another sign that a horse needs to have its teeth checked. Horses under the age of 5, or those fed grain, need a dental check at least once every 3 to 6 months.

Worming

Worm your horse regularly to prevent worms building up in the stomach and intestines. Many worming pastes should be used every 6 to 8 weeks. Follow the directions on the product as dosage frequency and amounts vary. Reducing the build-up of manure in your horse's paddock is also a simple way to reduce worm contamination of pastures. You should talk to a veterinarian about worming and other parasite prevention requirements that are suitable for your horse and its environment.



Vaccination

A veterinarian should vaccinate your horse for diseases such as tetanus, viral respiratory disease and strangles. Your veterinarian will advise what vaccinations your horse needs and how often they are required.

Do not let your horse get too fat or too thin. As a guide, if the ribs are showing it means the horse is too thin. A round rump, big belly and crested neck means the horse is too fat. Ideally ribs should be able to be felt but not be seen. A horse's body condition must not be allowed to become less than body condition score 2. Refer to [Condition Scoring and Weight Estimation of Horses](#) for more information about judging a horse's body condition.

Laminitis (founder)

Some horses, particularly ponies, can develop laminitis. Significant weight gain may cause this very painful hoof condition that may be untreatable and require the horse to be "put down". Consult a veterinarian if the horse appears lame or uncomfortable or if you are concerned about your horse's weight and need advice about feeding management. More information on laminitis can be found on the web page [Laminitis \(Founder\) in Horses](#).

Remember, if you suspect something is wrong with your horse and you are unsure about it, contact your veterinarian.

Colic

Colic is a name for a range of problems related to a horse's digestive tract (gut). Colic can be very painful and can have very serious consequences, including death. Symptoms include lying down or rolling frequently, teeth grinding, restlessness, repeatedly kicking or looking at their flanks or sides. If you suspect your horse has colic seek urgent veterinary attention.

Company

Horses are herd animals and need the company of others, whether in the same paddock or a neighbouring paddock. Keeping a horse on its own so that it cannot see other horses may lead to behavioural problems such as pacing along fence lines in the paddock or being difficult to control when being handled or ridden.

Supervision

As a minimum, check your horse daily to make sure it has enough feed and water, and is not injured or ill. Consult a veterinarian if the horse is injured or ill. If handled frequently, your horse will be easier to manage when the farrier, vet or dentist comes.

Stallions

Stallions are difficult to manage and are not suitable as companions. All colts and stallions should be desexed (gelded) unless they are to be used for breeding. Geldings and mares make much more controllable companions than stallions.

Disposal

If you can no longer care for the horse, you must arrange for it to be cared for by someone else, sell it or have it "put down" by a veterinarian or knackery. These methods of disposal are much kinder than letting the horse suffer from hunger and neglect. Selling a horse can be done privately through a friend or pony club, in

the newspaper, websites, or through a saleyard for public auction.

Riding

If your horse can be ridden, attending pony club or having regular riding lessons will help you to learn to ride properly and safely.

Breeding

Breeding horses is expensive, time consuming and requires special facilities. Breeding horses should not be done indiscriminately and should only be done by, or with the advice of, experienced people.

Buying a horse? Things to consider

- Can you provide all of the above requirements?
- How much time and money do you have to spare? Keeping a horse requires substantial commitment and is expensive.
- Do you have a suitable property to keep the horse on that is appropriately fenced, suitable for catching and exercising the horse, contains adequate water and pasture or other feed, and is close enough to home to allow daily visits? Do you have enough money to feed the horse if the pasture becomes inadequate?
- Can you afford to purchase gear, including a saddle, saddle blanket, bridle, grooming gear, feed and water containers, and riding clothes, including a suitable hard hat and riding boots? Also include the cost of, and access to, a pony club or riding lessons.
- Arrange an examination of the horse from your own vet before purchase. While expensive, this may save you from buying a horse that is unhealthy, lame or otherwise unsuitable. If possible,

take an experienced horse person with you to assist with selection of a suitable horse to buy. A trial period before buying is ideal so you can be sure that the horse is suited to you.

Emergencies

Make sure you have a plan for your horse in an emergency. Consider having your horse [microchipped](#) and make sure your property has a [Property Identification Code \(PIC\)](#). This will help to identify your horse, you and your property in an emergency, should the need arise. The emergency management arrangements for animals in Victoria are outlined in the [Victorian Emergency Animal Welfare Plan](#).

More information about managing animals in emergencies can be found at:

http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/emergencies-utm_source=agriculture-vic-gov-au&utm_medium=vanity-url-301ssredirect&utm_content=animalemergency&utm_campaign=agriculture

More information

Agriculture Victoria Phone: 136 186
www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/horses

Registered veterinary practitioners

RSPCA.

Phone: 9224 2222

<https://www.rspcavic.org/>

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