

# Competition First Aid

Horses competing, often at speed or over fences, can be at increased risk of injury or accident even when fully fit. Here is a run-down of common injuries and how to deal with them. Veterinary surgeons are available at most competitions for emergencies so be aware how to contact them ahead of time. Stay calm if your horse has an accident; this helps you respond effectively and reassures your horse.



**Broken legs** are serious injuries for any horse. Keep the horse still and call a vet immediately. Some fractures require x-rays to detect, and non-displaced fractures may be treated successfully. For example, a horse with a forearm fracture recovered well after six weeks of stable rest. Progress depends on fracture type and location.

**Hematomas** often appear dramatic but are typically harmless. Muscle injuries from impacts like kicks can cause noticeable swelling, which is usually just bruising, not a fracture, though both can look similar. Horses with hematomas generally remain comfortable, bear weight normally, and usually only show mild lameness at most.

**Tendon injuries** are common in racehorses and jumpers. It's crucial to keep the horse still until a vet examines it. Devices like the 'Kimzey' splint reduce strain on tendons, minimizing further injury. Cold hosing and anti-inflammatories such as 'bute' help with recovery. Ultrasound can identify the damaged area, best performed 7–10 days post-injury.



**Wounds** may range from mild to severe. Even small wounds can cause significant lameness, particularly if a puncture wound affects deeper structures. Clean all wounds with an antiseptic like very diluted chlorohexidine - never use disinfectants meant for surfaces. After cleaning, apply a padded dressing such as cotton wool, and consult your vet promptly. Ensure dressings stay dry; if they get wet, replace them immediately, as tight dressings can harm the leg.



**Overheating** is uncommon in Scotland, but if your horse overheats after exertion, e.g. a cross country event, keep applying cool water from head to tail. Use cool water for 10-15 minutes while keeping the horse walking to aid lactic acid removal. Avoid over-cooling the skin, as this can keep the body's core temperature elevated. Allow water to run off naturally.



It is important to maintain a fully stocked and current **first aid kit** in your lorry. This enables you to effectively manage situations involving your horse until the arrival of your veterinary surgeon. If you do not possess a first aid kit, your veterinary practice can typically provide one. Central Equine Vets offer an essential and comprehensive first aid kit that is available to all.