

Nosebleeds

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The technical name for a nosebleed is 'epistaxis'. They can be surprisingly common and be quite alarming when discovered by the owner.

Blood that appears at the nostrils can originate from anywhere in the upper or lower respiratory tract. That includes the sinuses, guttural pouches, nasal cavity and lungs. The causes therefore can be very varied.

Trauma

The most common cause of epistaxis in the horse is trauma to the head. Trauma, such as knocking the head on a stable door or a kick or fall can cause bleeding into a sinus, which then drains via the nose. In severe cases a fracture of the nasal or facial bones can cause soft tissue swelling that can also lead to bleeding. Bleeding is often mild but can increase when the horse lowers its head as this encourages drainage of the blood filled sinus.



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guttural pouches (pocket-like extensions of the inner ear canal that open into the pharynx). It is rare but can cause sudden and life-threatening bleeding. The fungus damages and erodes the wall of the artery (a branch of the internal carotid artery) that passes along the wall of the pouch, resulting in severe bleeding. It has been known for affected horses to be found dead in a 'pool' of blood.

Exercise induced

Exercise Induced Pulmonary Haemorrhage (EIPH) is a common condition that occurs in performance horses, i.e. racehorses or other horses that are pushed to the limit of their fitness. Exercise Induced Pulmonary Haemorrhage often goes undetected but can result in epistaxis. Bleeding is caused by rupture of capillaries (very small blood vessels) in the lung due to the enormous differences in pressure that occur there during strenuous exercise. In most cases, the haemorrhage, although adversely affecting athletic performance, causes no

illness, unless associated with or followed by lung infection (pneumonia). More severe EIPH may result from rupture of larger vessels and this may be painful. Racehorses that bleed too many times can be banned from racing.

Abnormal masses

While rare, horses can develop various tumours which can ulcerate or become fragile and suddenly bleed. The most common is an ethmoid haematoma which is an encapsulated mass in the nasal cavity. The cause is unknown. They are mostly seen in Thoroughbreds but other breeds can get them too.

Diagnosis

The best way to diagnose epistaxis is by using an endoscope. The scope is small enough to explore most areas of

the respiratory system of a horse. Samples can be taken from the windpipe and checked for the presence of blood. If trauma is suspected, X-rays may be taken to see if any fractures exist. X-rays can also be used to visualise fluid within sinuses that could indicate bleeding or pus within those structures.

Treatment

An accurate diagnosis of the cause of the haemorrhage is essential for appropriate treatment to be initiated. Simple bleeding, following minor trauma, will resolve with rest and time. The horse should receive antibiotics for several days as blood is an excellent medium for bacterial growth and secondary sinusitis.

Guttural pouch mycosis (fungal infection) requires surgical treatment to tie off the damaged artery and local flushing of the infected pouch with appropriate anti-fungal medication. Carotid ligation surgery may be risky, as the patient has often lost a large amount of blood, and cases should be referred to an experienced surgical team. Ethmoid haematoma cases can also lose large amounts of blood before and during surgical treatment. These cases usually need repeated surgical or laser treatment to remove the mass and, in spite of treatment, they often recur.

EIPH has no specific treatment though there are numerous products on the market 'claimed' to help.

If you have any concerns about your horse suffering from epistaxis, then simply phone your vet or phone Central Equine Vets on 0131 6645606.

Infection

Occasionally a sinusitis (infection in the sinus) can cause bleeding where a large blood vessel bursts, but in such cases there is usually some pus seen as well as blood. Abscesses in the lining of the nostrils, nasal cavities and pharynx can also result in blood in one or both nostrils. Strangles is a classic example.

A more serious infection that can occur is guttural pouch mycosis. This is a fungal infection that attacks one or both of the



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