

# Q&A

## HORSECARE

### OUR EXPERT PANEL



**BECKY LEES**  
Becky is an experienced vet who enjoys all aspects of equine medicine. She is vet advisor to Nettex. Becky enjoys riding in her spare time.



**BECKY STROUD**  
A freelance groom and rider, Becky is also a qualified massage therapist. She has over 10 years experience working with horses and running competition yards.



**THOMAS RIGHTON**  
Vet Thomas works at Hook Norton Veterinary Group, a member of XL Equine, and has a special interest in orthopaedic work, lameness and wound management.



Washing out mud is kinder to tail hair than brushing

## How can I care for his tail?

**Q** My cob has a beautiful, thick tail but it gets tangled very easily, especially in the winter. Can you give me any tips to care for it, so it always looks smart and to avoid the hair getting clogged up with mud?

Tracey Robson, Hull

**BECKY STROUD SAYS** If your cob is only turned out during the day, you could consider using a tail bag. However, there is always the possibility of it catching on fencing or a tree. An alternative, which will rip easily if it gets caught, is a large stocking.

Another solution for a horse turned out for short periods, is to plait the tail and secure the lower part to the dock using electrical tape.

If your horse lives out, a simple plait or two can make managing the tail easier. Plaits should be undone regularly or will result in increased hair breakage.

When faced with a muddy tail it is kinder to wash the hair, rather than trying to brush the dirt out.

Follow a tail wash with some detangling spray before using a wide toothed comb or your fingers to work out any knots.

## Laminitis query

**Q** Can a horse or pony have laminitis in one foot, or is it always in pairs?  
Angela Bowen, Wolverhampton

**BECKY LEES SAYS** Hormonal disorders are responsible for up to 90 per cent of laminitis cases and these horses will always have either two or four feet affected.

The front feet bear the most weight and so are commonly affected first, with severe cases having all four feet affected.

Usually, one foot is more severely affected, so it can appear they only have laminitis in one foot, when a pair is affected.

It is possible for laminitis to occur in only one foot. This often happens when a foot is overloaded for a significant period of time, due to the other foot or leg being painful, and the horse is unable to bear weight on it.

The most common example of this is following repair of bone fractures.

If pain relief is not adequate, then the other foot becomes overloaded and can suffer severe laminitis.



Laminitis most commonly occurs in the front feet

Horses that make a noise during exercise are called 'roarers'



## Why does he make a noise?

**Q** My six-year-old Irish Sports Horse makes a noise in fast work. My vet suggested an operation – what is involved and what is the prognosis for recovery?  
Megan Dean, by email

**THOMAS SAYS** There are numerous causes of respiratory noise at exercise. Without knowing what diagnosis your vet has made or what surgical treatment he has suggested, it is difficult for me to advise you.

The most common cause is Recurrent Laryngeal Neuropathy (RLN) – these horses are known to horse owners as 'roarers'.

In normal breathing, two cartilages in the horse's larynx (throat) open and close. With RLN, the left hand cartilage is paralysed and

hangs down in the closed position, causing partial obstruction of the airway.

This can be surgically corrected by tying the paralysed cartilage out of the way into a permanently open position (often referred to as a 'tie back').

The right hand side cartilage is unaltered and will still function as normal.

This enables the horse to fully open his airway during fast work and generally carries a good prognosis for improved performance.

As with any surgery there are risks involved, and there will be a recovery period of four to five months.

Horses which have had a 'tie back' operation have a slightly higher risk of suffering from respiratory infections and inflammation.

## I can't stop water freezing



There are a number of ways to prevent water buckets freezing over

**Q** What are the best ways to stop water buckets or tanks freezing? I've tried floating a ball in mine, but the water just freezes around it!  
Katie Chant, by email

**BECKY STROUD SAYS** Unless there is something to keep the ball moving, this often happens.

The best idea I have come across is to cut a lid for your water container from polystyrene. Cut it slightly smaller than the diameter of the container, so it floats freely on top of the water. Horses soon learn to push it down with their noses to get a drink.

You can insulate water buckets or troughs with bubble wrap, or place buckets inside a tyre or two. Stuffing the tyre with straw gives extra insulation.

Filling a plastic bottle with hot water and putting it in the bucket last thing at night can help, too.

### TIP from the TOP

Stop buckets freezing – and encourage drinking – by adding warm water so the temperature is tepid.

## What is liver fluke?

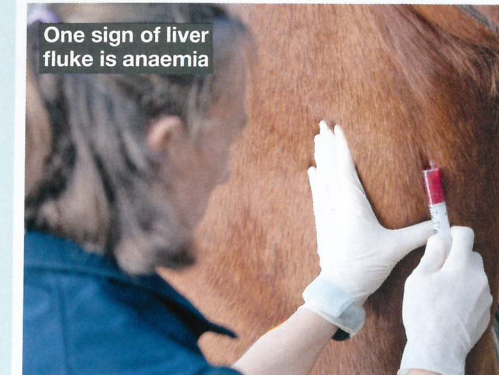
**Q** Two of my horses have been diagnosed with liver fluke – can you tell me more about the condition and how it affects horses?  
Name and address withheld

**BECKY LEES SAYS** Liver fluke is a flatworm that is found in the bile ducts of the liver. It has tiny sharp spines that irritate the bile ducts and can damage the liver.

Liver fluke lay their eggs in the bile ducts. The eggs move into the intestine and are passed in the dung.

If the eggs enter water, they hatch into larvae and find a water snail host, where they hatch into tiny tadpole-shaped worms six weeks later.

These attach to grass and are eaten by animals. They penetrate the intestinal wall



One sign of liver fluke is anaemia

and are carried in the blood to the liver, where they develop into adults.

Very little is known about liver fluke in horses, however they appear to be more resistant to fluke than cattle and sheep.

The most common sign is anaemia. There may also be soft dung, a dry coat and weight loss. The more severe signs seen in cattle and sheep (including death) are extremely rare in horses.

Worm egg counts can be done but they are unreliable as immature flukes do not produce eggs. Even when adult fluke are present, egg production can be intermittent.

If cattle and sheep in the same area have been affected by fluke, co-grazing horses will have some degree of infestation.

Fluke treatments are not licensed for horses, so their use needs to be carefully discussed with your vet.

Prognosis is good following treatment, with a slow, gradual resolution of anaemia and liver enzymes returning to normal levels.