

Is that cough a problem?

2023

Equine asthma is one of the most common medical conditions that affects adult horses, sometimes formerly called “heaves”, “recurrent airway obstruction”, and “inflammatory airway disease”. Equine asthma can manifest in a variety of presentations and severities. Horses with mild to moderate asthma may be seen coughing occasionally or at the beginning of a ride but are likely asymptomatic at rest. In cases of severe asthma, heaving respiratory effort, nasal discharge, and chronic coughing may be observed.

Equine asthma may be diagnosed by a veterinarian performing a physical exam, a rebreathing test to accentuate respiratory abnormalities, and a bronchoalveolar lavage. Bronchoalveolar lavage is a procedure in which fluid is obtained from the lungs and analyzed for inflammatory cells. This is the only way to definitively diagnose asthma.

Equine asthma cannot be cured but can be managed by a multifactorial approach which must start with environmental adjustments. Reducing exposure to environmental allergens, feeding wet hay or hay pellets, providing feed on a mat instead of directly on the ground, using a low dust bedding, and ensuring good ventilation will play a major role in improving the clinical signs of equine asthma. In addition to environmental changes, treatment with corticosteroids and bronchodilators can also be considered.

What respiratory signs have you observed in your horse?

Photo credit: <https://pixabay.com/photos/horse-neigh-forest-animal-head-2928236/>

