

What is equine asthma?

It has previously been known as COPD, IAD, RAO or heaves but has now been reclassified as mild, moderate or severe equine asthma. Characterised by lower airway inflammation, which is non-infectious and caused by environmental allergens.

Clinical signs

These can vary from mild to severe and are usually very case dependant. They can include:

- Coughing, at rest or at exercise
- Nasal discharge
- Increased respiratory effort and rate
- Reduced performance or prolonged recovery from exercise
- Severe cases can present with difficulty breathing

Diagnosis

We usually diagnose your horse based upon the history, a clinical exam and further diagnostic tests. These will include endoscopy to visualise the upper respiratory tract, and performing a tracheal wash and bronchoalveolar lavage. The wash and lavage will give us information on the cell types present in the airway. Without performing these further tests, we cannot confirm a definitive diagnosis of equine asthma.

Treatment

There are a number of treatment options for a horse with equine asthma, however treatment must be performed alongside management changes to prevent recurrence. The aim of treatment is to reduce the inflammation and to open up the airways.

The main treatment of choice is corticosteroids of which there are the following options:

- Aservo Equihaler
- Oral prednisolone
- Injectable dexamethasone
- Nebulised dexamethasone
- Human inhalers

We may also treat with bronchodilators or other nebulised medications.

Environmental/management changes:

- Turn out as much as possible
- Steam or soak hay or change to haylage
- Feed from the floor
- Use dust free bedding and do not deep litter
- Avoid mucking out/grooming/sweeping whilst horse in stable or barn
- Increase ventilation in the stable
- Stable horses away from the muck heap or forage storage
- Keep stables as clean as possible e.g. removing dust, cobwebs and cleaning under rubber matting