

WHAT HAPPENS AT REFERRAL?



The University of
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Reasons for referral to an equine hospital

The referral of a horse or pony suffering from colic may be considered for a number of different reasons, including:

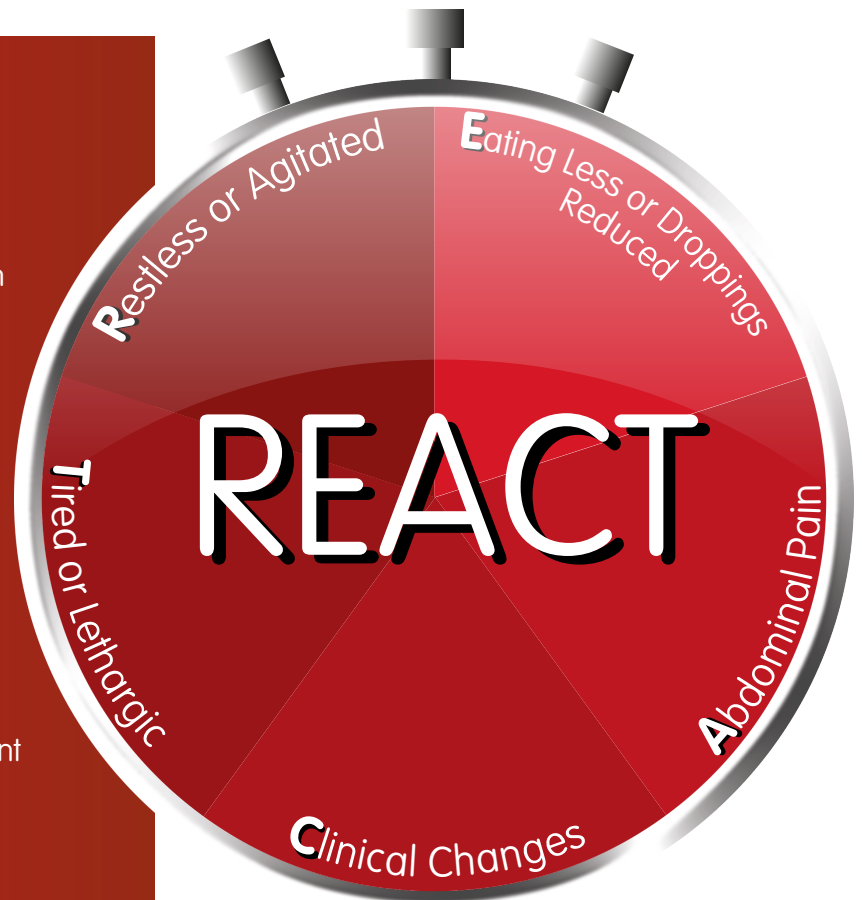
- The need to undertake more detailed clinical evaluation that may not be possible at home
- Provide constant observation
- Referral for possible surgery
- Be able to provide intensive medical treatment e.g. intravenous fluid therapy or repeated administration of fluids by nasogastric tube

The decision to refer a horse to an equine hospital should be made jointly by you (the owner), the primary veterinary surgeon and veterinary surgeons at the referral hospital. The choice of which equine hospital to refer to is often dictated by geography – the nearest facility will often be chosen because time is of the essence in many surgical and serious colic cases, and any delay in getting the horse to surgery can negatively impact the chances of recovery. However, the expertise and reputation of the referral hospital are also important factors to consider. Colic surgery is major surgery, and it is important that the hospital has appropriately trained surgeons with the back-up of an experienced team of vets and nurses who can provide the required level of care for anaesthesia and intensive therapy.

Choosing a facility that is accredited by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Practice Standards Scheme as an Equine Veterinary Hospital may be a good starting point in helping decide where to refer the horse, but your own veterinary surgeon is also likely to know what facilities and expertise are available in your area.



Surgery for a small intestinal strangulation



Prior to referral

Prior to referral, it is important to establish contact with the hospital to discuss the case. Additionally you should consider:

- Directions to the hospital
- Telephone contact numbers (including mobile phone number during travel)
- Estimated time of arrival
- Any deposit required by the hospital prior to examination/treatment of the horse
- Rough estimates of cost for examination and treatment
- Insurance policy (including any exclusions on the policy)
- Passport
- Brief medical history of the case and drugs administered by the primary veterinary surgeon
- Any previous relevant medical history (e.g. previous colic surgery)
- Advice from the referral hospital about treatments to be administered prior to or during travel to the hospital

What happens when you arrive at the referral hospital?

When you arrive at the hospital, you can expect an examination of the horse to be undertaken straight away. At many larger referral hospitals, this initial assessment will be undertaken by a junior vet (an intern or resident). Depending on the nature of the case, this may include a physical examination, blood tests, rectal examination, ultrasound examination, passage of a stomach tube and belly tap. Some of these examinations may repeat things that your own vet has already done, but it is important that they are repeated in order to give a full picture of the case to the hospital team. The vet will report the findings to the senior veterinary surgeon on duty, who is also likely to examine the horse. The vet will then discuss their findings with you and make recommendations about the most appropriate treatment. Any decisions about how to proceed will be made jointly by yourself, your own veterinary surgeon and the senior veterinary surgeons at the hospital.

When your horse is admitted to the hospital for treatment you should be informed about the hospital's policies regarding:

- Visiting times
- How and when you will receive updates about progress of the case
- How and when you will receive updates about costs

Legal issues, consent form and passport

On admission of the horse to the hospital, you will be expected to sign a consent form, which describes the terms and conditions of the service that the hospital is providing. This document should be explained to you prior to you signing it, and you should be given a copy to keep for your future reference.

The hospital will also need to see your horse's passport, in particular to determine whether or not your horse is signed out of the human food chain. There are legal requirements that need to be adhered to when administering medicines to horses that are declared as intended for human consumption as some drugs are not able to be used. If you do not wish your horse to ever enter the human food chain, then you should sign the appropriate part of Section IX (passports produced before January 1st 2016) or Section II Part II (on passports produced after January 1st 2016) on the passport. When your horse is signed out of the human food chain, then all available drugs can be used as needed.



What happens after your horse is admitted to hospital?

You and your own veterinary surgeon should expect daily updates from the hospital about how your horse is doing and how well he/she is responding to treatment. If your horse requires surgery, the risks associated with the surgery as well as the expected outcomes and costs should be discussed with you.



Unfortunately, colic surgery is never without risk, and a successful outcome can never be guaranteed. Likewise, the medical treatments of horses with other serious abdominal diseases are not always successful. You should expect to have a full and frank discussion with the senior veterinary surgeon about these issues prior to making a decision about whether to proceed with surgical or other treatments and what happens during the course of your horse's stay at the hospital. In some cases, the difficult decision to euthanase your horse may need to be made.

What happens when your horse comes home?

If all goes well, and your horse is ready to be discharged home following treatment, you and your own veterinary surgeon should receive thorough discharge instructions (given both verbally and in writing) that will describe what treatments have been undertaken and how the horse should be managed when he/she gets home.

For more information
please visit: bhs.org.uk/colic