



Managing your horse in cold weather

In the extreme weather conditions we have been experiencing, keeping our horses warm, comfortable and well is a constant struggle. With frozen water and fields is it better to keep them in or turn them out? Sudden changes in management can lead to stressed unhappy horses.

Below are a few things to remember when looking after your horses in this weather.

Depending on the weather a horse's energy requirement can increase by between 20 – 40% above normal maintenance needs

Basic needs

Water

- When the pasture is frozen there is less moisture content – therefore your horse may well want to drink more than is normal for them.
- Ensure fresh water is available at all times – break the ice in troughs and water buckets as many times as necessary. Insulating your water buckets may help. Take the chill off a bucket of water by adding warm water.
- If your horse does not have access to enough water, impaction colic and choke can occur.

Feeding

- To assist with internal warmth feed ad-lib good quality fibre.
- For an average 500kg horse a minimum of 15kg (small hay bale) of fibre per day could be required. Horses require 2.5 – 3% of their body weight in food to maintain weight.
- Reduce your horses concentrate feed if on box rest or limited exercise during bad weather – too much hard feed when resting / in lighter than normal work can also result in tying up or colic.
- Any changes to the diet should be introduced gradually.
- These guidelines may not be appropriate for those good doers or those trying to lose weight and diet should be tailored specifically to the individual.

Exercise

- Carefully consider your exercise programme if you have not been able to turn your horse out and this is a change to his normal routine.
- Ensure you warm up and cool down your horse adequately to avoid tying up or colic.
- Use an exercise blanket to protect the muscles in the hindquarters from becoming cold and strained.
- Offer tepid water following exercise.
- Ensure the area for exercise is safe. Icy yards can cause injuries to horses and their handlers!

If you have any concerns or questions regarding your horse's management or welfare during this cold spell, please contact a member of the equine team