

## Heat Stress

### (Post-race ataxia/ Exertional Heat Illness)

Heat Stress occurs in horses when the heat produced whilst exercising cannot be dissipated quickly enough. When galloping, horse's muscles produce heat which increases the core body temperature. Horses lose heat mainly through sweating. When a horse cannot lose the heat produced fast enough signs of heat stress develop. This happens most commonly when the weather is hot or humid or there has been a recent increase in ambient temperature.

### Signs

Signs of heat stress can vary. Horses can be depressed or agitated and can become wobbly or violent. In the worst cases they can collapse and might die from organ failure.

### Prevention

The horse should be kept as cool as possible at all stages of the race preparation. For example, travelling at cooler times of the day, ensuring access to fresh water at all times and cooling with water after travelling and again before racing. After racing, prompt removal of tack, hoods etc. helps the horse lose heat. Rugs and sheets, even when soaked in cold water, are contraindicated as they prevent maximal heat loss. Prompt application of cold water over the largest muscles (hindquarters, shoulders, neck) is the quickest way to help the horse to lose the extra heat and keeping horses walking, in the shade or vicinity of fans where possible, can help evaporation and quicken heat loss.

### Treatment

When signs of Heat Stress develop, prompt and constant application of water over the largest muscles, combined with walking the horse where safe, is the quickest way to cool the horse. When horses are extremely agitated, intravenous injection of anti-inflammatories can help resolve the problem. Ensuring staff are familiar with Heat Stress signs and treatment is fundamental to successful prevention and management.