

STAYING SAFE DURING VET VISITS

Safety around horses requires both common sense and experience. Horse riding is a high risk activity but handling horses from the ground can be just as dangerous for the unwary. By identifying the risks and hazards in advance of your vet visit, potential accidents or injuries can be prevented or minimised.

A principle of UK law is that if a risk is foreseeable there is a duty to eliminate or reduce it so far as reasonably practicable. Before your vet arrives you should perform a risk assessment to identify possible hazards around the yard. This includes

- anything that could cause a slip or trip such as loose wires or misaligned flooring
- moving vehicles
- any particularly aggressive horses

After identifying the hazards you can identify who may be harmed and how. Set out steps to address the risks such as clearing a working space so that it is free from hazards or verbally communicating to point out potential hazards. If you need further information on performing a risk assessment, the HSE has provided guidance which can be found at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.htm>.

When your vet arrives, it is of paramount importance to discuss with them any concerns you have about the handling of the horse. Always warn your vet if your animal is young or unhandled. Similarly, alert them if your horse has any quirks or vices, such as biting/kicking/rearing. If your horse is particularly needle shy you should work on desensitising your horse by practising with an empty syringe so they become accustomed to having it on their neck without a reaction. You may also want to practise picking up your horse's feet, each in turn, so that it does not react to the vet.



When handling your horse for the vet, be aware that you have a very important job. You are protecting yourself, your horse and the vet from harm. No matter how sensible and quiet your horse normally is, horses can react suddenly and unexpectedly. Indeed, horses under sedation can show uncharacteristic aggression and can kick or bite without warning. Your job relies on good handling techniques and awareness.

Here are some tips to think about when holding a horse for the vet:

- Use a working area that is free of hazards
- Apply fly spray during summer months to prevent the horse from becoming irritated
- Keep your attention on the task at hand, put mobile phones away!
- Communicate with the vet and ask where they want you to stand and how to hold the horse
- Keep a good grip on the lead rope so that you can readily control the horse if it reacts suddenly
- Wear appropriate footwear/gloves/coats
- Talk to the horse to provide some verbal reassurance

- If you have reason to reprimand the horse, always tell the vet before you do so in case the animal jumps or reacts suddenly
- Always stay on the same side of the horse as the vet while they are working so that you can turn the horse's head towards you and the hind end will turn away from both of you
- Make sure the horse's head collar fits and the lead rope is in good condition
- Consider wearing a riding hat when undertaking high risk procedures or when dealing with young or unhandled horses

If your vet is taking x-rays at your yard, it is important to have as few people around as possible. Anyone under the age of 18 or pregnant women should not be present when x-rays are being taken. Your vet will give you a lead apron to wear and it is important that this fits comfortably so you are not restricted in your role as handler.

In case of emergency, always have a human first aid kit readily available so you can quickly react to any unfortunate situations. If such a situation arises, make sure to keep records of what happened and how.

Remember to always use common sense around horses and ask your vet if you are unsure. Hopefully your vet visits will be a positive experience for all.