

Guidelines for Racing in Hot Weather

High-intensity exercise causes rapid accumulation of heat within the horse's body. Horses remove heat from their body by sweat and evaporative cooling. High ambient temperatures and humidity can overwhelm these mechanisms. Signs of heat stress may include rapid breathing with flared nostrils, profuse sweating or in a small number of cases the absence of sweat (anhidrosis), elevated or irregular heart rate, synchronous diaphragmatic flutter (thumps), muscle cramping and delayed recovery from exercise. Dehydrated horses may appear dull or listless and have a dry mouth and mucus membranes.

During exercise, the rectal temperature of a horse may increase to 103°F and should gradually return to normal within 30-45 minutes upon completion of exercise/race. Rectal temperatures that exceed 103.5° F indicate overheating. A rectal temperature of 105°F or higher is a dangerous situation that requires immediate veterinary attention.

The following suggestions are offered to help trainers safely manage their horses in the event of a heat advisory:

- Climatic conditions are monitored by racing officials throughout the day. Should the heat index rise to a dangerous level, a heat advisory will be issued to trainers. In extreme conditions, races will be cancelled.
- Proper conditioning is the key to avoiding heat stress. Fit horses that are acclimatized to the weather are best able to deal with heat.
- Horsemen are encouraged to hose horses down prior to their arrival in the paddock. Ice water-soaked light sheets are effective in keeping horses cool on their way to the paddock.
- Assistants are encouraged to bring buckets filled with ice, sponges, and scrapers along to the paddock for sponging before and after the race.
- Water is available in the paddock and at the gaps of the racetrack.
- Hoses are available along the outside rail just past the finish line. All horses should be hosed immediately after the race. The whole horse should be cooled with emphasis on the large vessels of the neck, legs, and abdomen.
- As soon as water on the horse warms up, it is beneficial to scrape it off.
- Be familiar with the locations of ice water cooling stations available along the outside rail of the racetrack. If a horse gets in trouble that is not near a cooling station, the horse ambulance has ice water on board and will come immediately to assist.

- Ice and cold water is also available in the test barn for your use, if necessary.
- Track veterinarians monitor all horses prior to, during, and after the race. They are equipped to treat any horse experiencing heat exhaustion.
- Minimize the dose of diuretics when training and racing in hot and humid weather and provide oral electrolyte supplementation on a daily basis.
- Provide good ventilation in your barn and limit time spent in horse trailers.
- Monitor your horse's temperature as you cool out your horse until it stabilizes at 101°F.
- Gradually introduce drinking water after exercise. Your horse may drink 2 to 3 gallons of water during the recovery period after a race.
- Use of fans and hand walking exercise in a shady area can assist in cooling after the race.

Consult with your private veterinarian for additional information for prevention and treatment of heat exhaustion or heat stroke. In some of the more severe cases, additional fluid therapy or shipping to a veterinary clinic with climate-controlled stalls may be appropriate post race.

Thank you for your efforts to provide the best possible care for your horses. As stewards of the horse, we must do whatever we can to ensure their health and safety.

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