



Hot Weather Guide

for Horse Owners

Practical advice on keeping your horse safe,
healthy and comfortable during hot weather.



HorseWorld

Introduction

Horses are incredibly resilient animals, but they can struggle when temperatures rise suddenly. In the UK, we often go from mild weather to unexpected heatwaves, and our horses may not have time to acclimatise. This guide will help you adapt your routine and keep your horse safe and comfortable.

Hydration

Water is the single most important factor in keeping your horse cool. A horse can drink 30-50 litres per day in normal conditions, and significantly more in hot weather.

- Ensure constant access to clean, fresh water
- Check troughs and buckets at least twice daily
- Offer soaked hay or wet feeds to boost water intake
- Provide salt licks or add electrolytes to encourage drinking
- Place water sources in shaded areas to keep them cool



HorseWorld Tip

Some horses are reluctant drinkers. Try adding a splash of apple juice or mint to their water to encourage them. You can also offer water from a bucket after exercise — many horses prefer this to a trough. Always have plain water available too.



Shade and Ventilation

Providing adequate shade is essential during hot weather. Not all shade is equal — natural tree cover is significantly cooler than man-made structures.

- Trees provide the best shade — they cool the air through transpiration
- Avoid metal-roofed buildings which trap heat
- Ensure shelters have good airflow — open at least two sides
- Field shelters should face away from the sun
- Consider temporary shade sails if natural shade is limited



HorseWorld Tip

Natural tree shade can be up to 10°C cooler than the surrounding area. This is because trees release moisture through their leaves, actively cooling the air beneath them — something a metal roof simply cannot do.



Exercise and Travelling

During hot weather, adjust your riding routine to protect your horse from overheating.

- Ride during the coolest parts of the day – early morning or evening
- Reduce the intensity and duration of exercise
- Allow longer warm-up and cool-down periods
- Avoid unnecessary travel – horseboxes heat up quickly
- If you must travel, do so early morning or late evening
- Ensure good ventilation in the horsebox and offer water on arrival



HorseWorld Tip

Travelling can be more physically demanding than exercise itself. A horse uses significant energy to balance in a moving vehicle, and with limited airflow, temperatures inside can soar. If travel isn't essential, postpone it.



Cooling

When your horse needs cooling down, act quickly and effectively.

- Hose with cold water – start at the legs and work up
- Do NOT scrape water off – leaving it on continues the cooling process
- Use fans to increase airflow in stables
- Apply water to large blood vessels (neck, between hind legs)
- Offer cool (not icy) drinking water
- Use cooling rugs or wet towels on the neck



HorseWorld Tip

Don't scrape water off! Research shows that leaving water on the skin continues to draw heat away as it evaporates. Keep reapplying water until the horse feels cool to the touch.



Humidity

Humidity is often overlooked but plays a crucial role in your horse's ability to cool down. When the air is humid, sweat cannot evaporate efficiently, meaning your horse's natural cooling system is compromised.

On humid days, be extra vigilant – even if temperatures don't seem extreme, your horse may struggle to regulate their body temperature. Reduce exercise further and increase active cooling measures.



Sun Protection

Horses can get sunburnt, particularly those with pink skin or white markings.

- Apply equine sun cream to exposed pink skin (nose, ears, around eyes)
- Use UV-protective fly masks to shield the face
- Lightweight fly sheets can protect the body without overheating
- Reapply sun cream after swimming or hosing
- Check for signs of sunburn – redness, peeling, or soreness



Did you know?

Horses with pink skin are far more prone to sunburn than those with dark pigmentation. Areas like the nose, lips, and around the eyes are particularly vulnerable – treat them just as you would your own skin.

Recognising Heat Stress

Knowing the signs of heat stress can save your horse's life. Look for these indicators:



Comfortable

- Normal breathing rate (8-14 breaths per minute at rest)
- Eating and drinking normally
- Alert and responsive
- Skin springs back when pinched (good hydration)



Take Action

- Heavy or rapid breathing
 - Excessive sweating or no sweating at all
 - Lethargy or reluctance to move
 - Elevated heart rate
- Move to shade, hose with cold water, offer water, increase airflow



Call Your Vet Immediately

- Stumbling, confusion, or collapse
 - Body temperature above 40°C (104°F)
 - Rapid, shallow breathing or flared nostrils
 - Skin tenting (dehydration)
- Begin cooling immediately while waiting for the vet. Do not stop hosing.

A HorseWorld Hot Weather Routine

A suggested daily schedule to help you manage your horse's care during hot weather.



Early Morning (5-7am)

- Check water — refill and clean troughs
- Turn out if field has good shade
- Apply sun cream to vulnerable areas
- Ride or exercise now if planned



Mid-Morning to Afternoon (10am-4pm)

- Bring in or ensure access to shade
- Check water levels again
- Avoid riding or strenuous activity
- Monitor for signs of heat stress
- Use fans in stables if horses are in



Late Afternoon (4-6pm)

- Hose down if horse is warm
- Offer fresh water and soaked hay
- Light groundwork or short hack if cooler
- Reapply sun cream if needed



Evening (7-9pm)

- Turn out for the night if safe to do so
- Final water and hay check
- Remove fly sheets/masks for the night
- Quick health check — look for sunburn or swelling

Adjust this routine to suit your horse and your yard. Every horse is different — the key is to be observant and proactive.



Key reminders and myth-busting to keep your horse safe.

Cold water is safe for cooling

There is no evidence that cold water causes shock or muscle cramps in hot horses. Research confirms it is the most effective way to cool a horse quickly.

Dark-coated horses absorb more heat

Black and dark bay horses heat up faster in direct sunlight. They may need extra shade and more frequent cooling than lighter-coloured horses.

Donkeys need extra monitoring

Donkeys are stoic and may not show obvious signs of distress until they are seriously unwell. Check them regularly and provide shade and water.

Every horse is different

Know your horse's normal behaviour, breathing rate, and habits. Changes from their baseline are the earliest warning signs of heat stress.

Be proactive, not reactive

Don't wait for signs of heat stress to appear. Start cooling measures early in the day and adjust routines before the hottest hours arrive.

HorseWorld Values

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