

HEALTH TEAM REPORT

"WINTER PRECAUTIONS!"

BY: SOPHIE THOMAS

As we enter into our wet, cold season it is important to take into consideration the necessary changes in everyday practices to ensure the safety of both our volunteers and the wonderful horses we work with. Below is a list of things to consider during your shift throughout the winter. I have also provided a list of precautions the Health Team has taken into consideration.

- **Adjustment to Feeding Programs:** As access to pasture declines it is important to provide additional vitamins and minerals. Each horse's concentrations (grains) will be adjusted based on weight, age, activity level, and maintenance requirements. You will notice that most of our horses will have an increase to their concentrations.
- **Hay to Help Horses Keep Warm:** Horses kept outside need to eat more fodder. Horses produce a lot of heat during [digestion](#). This means that throughout the cold months we will need to be mindful of the amount of hay we provide them. We do not want to provide so much that waste is produced but enough so that they always have access to it.
- **Preventing Packed Snow in Feet:** If snow packs into your horse's hooves try smearing the bottom with petroleum jelly. Monarch will be at particular risk due to his shoes but all the horses will require additional attention to their feet to prevent snow from packing and cracks from forming. Alter a Health Team member immediately if you suspect a crack is new and may require attention.
- **If You Ride:** Drying a horse out after a workout is difficult but critical in preventing hypothermia or opportunistic conditions that become a greater risk to a horse battling to stay warm. Because our horses are not stabled, a horse could be suffering for hours before the next volunteer arrives. If you choose to ride, make sure you have the time to adequately dry of the horse.
- **Insulation:** A horse's coat is critical in keeping them warm and happy. A horse's coat is layered- the first layer providing insulation

and the second layer serving as a wind/rain barrier. If the horses are wet, brushing them will push the moisture to their skin causing them to get cold. Only remove surface dirt on rainy days and take advantage of warm, dry days and brush them thoroughly.

- **Clean/Clear Frozen Water Buckets:** Rubber buckets are easier to knock the ice out of if they become frozen and do not pose a cracking risk. Check EVERY bucket every shift and remove ice. Although the weather is cooler horses are at higher risk of suffering from dehydration in the winter as they become more reluctant to drink the frigid water.

A horse's daily intake of water increases in the winter as their access to pasture grass or other water sources decreases.

In addition to the list I have provided, I implore everyone to be mindful of other hazards such as ice and frozen hog fuel. Not only do they pose a risk to us but they introduce a new risk to the horses. Make sure to check every horse thoroughly each shift for cuts, soreness, and lameness issues.

HEALTH TEAM CONSIDERATIONS

- **Horses Teeth Checked:** Each horse will have their teeth examined and attended to if needed. The inability to grind food properly will prevent a horse from getting all of the nutrients and energy it needs especially because energy needs increase during colder weather.
- **Bots/Tapeworm:** Each horse will receive a dose of ivermectin (worm medication able to kill bot larvae) after the first heavy frost to banish any bots they may have. They will continue on a regular deworming program throughout the winter.
- **Don't Let Hooves Get Overgrown:** Each horse will continue on a regular trimming schedule to help reduce the risk of chipping, help the feet hold less snow, and to provide more grip on the frozen ground.

Have a Happy, Safe Winter!!