



WHITEPAPER

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Equine veterinarians and equine welfare



FEEVA
Every horse matters

Endorsed by the Federation of European
Equine Veterinary Associations

Contents

Introduction	3
Statements	5
Husbandry	5
Horses during activities	6
Breeding	8
End of life	8
Background to statements	9
Contact with conspecifics	9
Free movement	10
Nutrition	11
Healthcare and veterinary procedures	13
Human-horse collaboration	14
Training aids	14
Horses and sport	15
Transport	15
Horse breeding	16
End of life	16
The equine veterinarian	17
Sources	18

About the KNMvD

The Royal Dutch Veterinary Association (Koninklijke Nederlandse Maatschappij voor Diergeneeskunde - KNMvD) is an association for and by veterinarians. Our organisation has three main goals. Firstly, we represent the interests of our members, the Dutch veterinarians. We do this, for example, by sharing our knowledge and experience with the authorities for the establishment of national policies. Furthermore, we help develop and professionalise our profession. Finally, we offer members a large number of products and services that are important in exercising their profession.

Because veterinarians are active in a variety of species-related fields, the KNMvD is subdivided in multiple sections. The Equine Section (Cluster Paard) represents the Dutch equine veterinarians and contributes to further development of equine veterinary medicine, in the interest of horses and their owners.



Introduction

Horsesⁱ have been part of our society for centuries. Keeping horses implies the responsibility of owners to ensure their welfare. Veterinarians are the trusted advisors about equine welfare as they have knowledge of the physiology, pathology and ethology of horses.

The present whitepaper describes what equine veterinarians consider important in the context of equine welfare. It is based on the following definition of wellbeing:

*'An animal experiences wellbeing when it is able to actively adapt to its living conditions and thereby achieve a state that it perceives as positive.'*¹

ⁱ Throughout this whitepaper, the word 'horses' also refers to ponies and other equids.

There are different ways and different reasons why people keep horses. Additionally, the individual needs of each horse may differ. As a direct consequence, it is impossible to consider all horses within one unique category regarding their needs for wellbeing. Nevertheless, some requirements do apply to every horse, because those have persisted during the evolution of the horse. Veterinarians are dedicated to helping horse keepers to optimise equine welfare.

In addition, increasing scientific knowledge of equine welfare and husbandry is available. For a number of topics, the scientific basis is now solid enough for equine veterinarians to establish robust welfare criteria for keeping, caring for, and working with horses. Equine veterinarians may feel the need to take part in welfare discussions, or to speak out at times when they are confronted during their daily work with situations in which equine welfare may be compromised. These can be difficult situations. However, equine veterinarians are the most appropriate professionals to help horse keepers, owners and riders to improve and optimise the health and welfare of their horse(s) where necessary. It is important to consider the individual circumstances, but always with the horse's best interests in mind.

The Committee on Equine Welfare produced this whitepaper on behalf of the Equine Section of the KNMvD. The statements in this whitepaper describe what equine veterinarians believe the welfare and health status of horses should comply with. Equine veterinarians are committed to help horse people to achieve this state of welfare. The aim of this whitepaper is to support equine veterinarians in advising on equine welfare. Equine veterinarians follow the (scientific) developments in the field of equine welfare and health. This whitepaper will therefore be updated as necessary to reflect new insights.

The board of FEEVA (Federation of European Equine Veterinary Associations) wholeheartedly endorses the present KNMvD whitepaper on equine welfare, aligning its commitment to advancing the wellbeing of horses in veterinary practice. This endorsement underscores its shared dedication to promoting the highest standards of equine care and ethical treatment.



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DISCLAIMER

The KNMvD has taken the utmost care in drawing up this whitepaper in Dutch language. The present translation of the document is a joint effort from FEEVA and KNMvD. In the event of differing interpretations between the Dutch and English version of this whitepaper, the Dutch version should be considered the leading version. However, both associations cannot accept any liability for the consequences of decisions made on the basis of the information provided, even if it contains inaccuracies. Reproduction of information from this whitepaper is permitted provided the source is mentioned.



STATEMENTS

HUSBANDRY

1 Horses should have daily contact with conspecifics, preferably in a group and in a suitable environmentⁱⁱ.

For horses, the freedom to exhibit social behaviour with conspecifics is a basic need.² It is therefore necessary for horses to have the opportunity to socialise with other horses every day. Limiting physical contact by distance or separation is detrimental to their wellbeing. If horses live in a group, a proper introduction protocol should be followed when introducing a new group member. In addition, the environment where a group of horses lives must be designed to meet the needs of all members of the herd. Thereby, care is taken that group size is not too big for the available space.

When accommodating foals, it should be considered that foals have special needs to develop normal social behaviour and to be able to display play behaviour. That means that foals should ideally grow up with other foals.^{3,4}

Additionally, the horses' living environment must provide shelter⁵, clean bedding and a dry surface. If a horse is kept in an individual stall, the surface area should be at least twice the horse's height squared.^{6,7} Horses also require fresh air and sufficient light, with attention for the circadian rhythm.⁵

2 All horses must be able to move freely on a daily basis.

Horses are steppe animals by nature, anatomically and physiologically adapted to 5-10 km of foraging spread over 24 hours.⁸ The equine body therefore needs daily exercise to function properly, e.g., for the physiological functioning of the digestive and locomotor systems. Safe and free movement plays an important role in injury prevention.^{9,10} In addition, daily free movement, independently from human interaction, has a positive influence on horses' mental wellbeing.^{9,10}

3 Horses should be fed good-quality roughage as basis of their diet.

A horse's gastrointestinal system is made to digest and absorb small amounts of high-fibre feed throughout the whole day.^{11,12,13} High-fibre feed means good quality roughage such as grass, hay or haylage.

Absence of prolonged hunger or thirst is a basic need for equine welfare.^{12,13} In addition, this requires appropriate food and water to be offered in a physiologically responsible manner. In practice, this means that horses must be offered fresh water and roughage, the latter with a maximum of 6 hours between feeding sessions.

ii Environment refers to the place where the horse spends most of time.

The basis of the ration should be roughage. Supplementary (concentrate) feed must be tailored to the horse's individual needs and serves to make up for any nutrient deficiencies from roughage. To protect the horse's stomach, concentrates must be provided after the horse has had the opportunity to eat roughage.¹⁴

4 Horses must receive good healthcare and are only subject to physical procedures when a veterinary indication is present.

Horses should receive the best possible care from a team of qualified healthcare professionals, coordinated by equine veterinarians. All treatments, both preventive and curative, must always be in the horse's best interest. Physical procedures that have a cosmetic purpose and/or affect the horse's welfare will be rejected by equine veterinarians. Examples include trimming whiskers and clipping ears. Tail docking and microchip removal are prohibited. An exception can be made for tail docking in case of veterinary necessity. The Dutch law makes an exception for castration.¹⁵ The performance of this procedure is reserved (by Dutch law) to registered veterinarians.

HORSES DURING ACTIVITIES

5 Horses and people work together harmoniously while both experience this collaboration positively.

Horses should be used by trained supervisors in a harmonious and animal-friendly way. The intensity of work should be determined in accordance with the horse's condition. Experience of pain by horses during activities is not accepted under any circumstances. Attention should also be paid to the age of horses when commencing training, which will also depend on the type of horse and the discipline. Horses must be physically and mentally capable to perform the required work. Care must be taken to ensure an adequate warm-up and cool-down, and a good balance between rest and exercise in the training schedule. Rest should also include free movement and/or grazing. Everyone involved should be able to interpret the horse's behaviour correctly. The horse's handler should have sufficient knowledge (or be supervised by a trained instructor) of the physical and mental learning principles of horses and how this learning process can be optimally deployed. The handler should ensure that these techniques are known and used by everyone to warrant safety while handling a horse.

6

Training aids should be used sparingly and only to promote the horse's natural movement and posture.

Training aids should have a positive influence on the horse's movement and posture and not counteract them. Training aids must be used by experienced handlers with knowledge of the learning principles of the horse and with moderation so that they do not affect the horse's welfare.

7

Equestrian sports must be exclusively conducted with healthy horses without the use of unauthorised drugs.

During competitions and inspections, only *fit-to-compete* horses may be presented without the use of unauthorised drugs. Ideally, a veterinarian will assess the physical fitness of the horse for sport as a prerequisite prior to competition. Horses must not perform under the influence of unauthorised drugs. After veterinary treatment, the horse should have sufficient time to fully recover before participating again in competitions or other activities.

8

Horses must be transported responsibly.

Transport is restricted to healthy horses only. The transport of injured or sick horses is only allowed in consultation with the veterinarian. Loading horses must be carried out calmly, with patience and under the guidance of experienced people. When horses are transported together, care is taken for their safety, considering their character and gender. During transport, horses must be protected against the risk of injury and transmission of infectious diseases. The



vehicle should be safe, well ventilated and well maintained. The vehicle must be regularly cleaned and disinfected if shared with other horses. The vehicle must be driven by experienced and competent people. There should always be someone with the vehicle who can competently handle the horse.

For journeys longer than 4 hours, regular breaks should be taken to allow the horse to put its head down and to offer feed and water.¹⁶ In addition, weather conditions must be taken into account (in the Netherlands: including implementing the Dutch extreme weather protocol¹⁷).

BREEDING

9

Animal health and welfare must be key when breeding horses.

Veterinary management of equine reproduction is done with respect for the horse's physiology and welfare.

Equine veterinarians speak out against breeding for characteristics that may compromise horses' health and welfare.

Veterinarians make a positive contribution to the breeding of healthy horses through (scientific) research. Based on the latter, equine veterinarians advise owners and studbooks on the suitability of horses for breeding.

END OF LIFE

10

All horses deserve a good quality of life and a dignified end of life.

Equine veterinarians assist owners with decision-making around the last phase of a horse's life and its ending. The latter can be in the form of euthanasia by the veterinarian or by slaughter. Both methods are welfare-neutral and should be done with respect for the animal.



BACKGROUND TO STATEMENTS ON EQUINE WELFARE

The information in the background to these statements refers to a desired situation for the various aspects of equine welfare. The background has been carefully substantiated by equine veterinarians with current practical and scientific knowledge. However, there is no one-size-fits-all solution for improving welfare, and the insights presented are continuously subject to new professional understanding. This background will therefore be regularly updated to reflect current scientific and technical knowledge. Moreover, equine veterinarians will always look at the horse's unique situation and provide tailor-made advice.

1. Horses should have daily contact with conspecifics, preferably in a group and in a suitable environment.

For horses, the freedom to exhibit social behaviour with conspecifics is a basic need. It is therefore necessary for the horses' welfare to be able to have social contact with other horses every day.

Being able to socialise is a behavioural need for horses.^{2,18,19} Neurological mechanisms play a role in this, which the horse cannot influence. Not being able to exercise social behaviour normally results in stress and impairment to welfare.

Social contact means that horses can seek physical contact with conspecifics according to their own needs, e.g. nose contact, grooming or play.¹⁸ Horse owners must therefore give their horses the opportunity to have daily social contact with other horses. Thus, at least two horses must always be housed at one location. There are exceptions to this, for example, if a horse's health does not allow it and only after consultation with a veterinarian.

If a horse is housed in an individual stall, a number of criteria must be taken into account from a welfare point of view. The size of the stall area should be at least twice the horse's height squared.²³ This way, the horse has the space to lie fully on its side with legs stretched out. Only

in this position the horse is able to achieve REM sleep, which is important for normal functioning and for physical and mental recovery.^{6,7,20}

The natural need for social contact between horses also applies in stables. Stalls should be built in such a manner that horses can see and touch each other. This can be achieved by using stall walls which are open at the top, or bars as stall dividers. The bars should be at the appropriate height for the concerned horse.²¹ If stall walls are closed, spacious 'sniffing holes' should be provided. 'Sniffing holes' should preferably be large enough that horses can see each other's whole head, i.e. from ears to nostrils. This is necessary because horses have a different field of vision than humans, with a blind spot when looking straight ahead.¹⁹ The stalls should also be built in such a way that the horse has an overview of its surroundings. This not only promotes the possibility of social contact but also allows the horse to perceive its surroundings thoroughly and thus anticipate possible danger. This prevents unnecessary stress. To give horses a visual overview in a stall, they should preferably be able to bring their head outside the stall.²¹

It is not desirable that a horse is unable to see another horse for a part of the day when it is in the stall or paddock. If necessary, the horse can be placed in a single stall where it has the opportunity to seek visual contact at a somewhat greater distance (up to 30 metres), or another horse can be temporarily placed nearby.²¹

Normal social contact between horses is best achieved by housing the horse in a fixed group.¹⁹ A proper introduction protocol should be followed when horses are added to the group to avoid introduction problems. If horses are housed in a group for more than 6 hours a day, the location where a group of horses resides must be designed so that it meets the needs of all members of the herd. Thereby, care is taken that group size is not too big for the available space.¹⁹ It is recommended that the pasture or paddock has a rectangular shape and measures at least 150 m² for two horses. For more than two horses, this area should be increased by 40 m² for each additional horse.²²

When accommodating foals, it should be taken into account that foals have special needs to develop normal social behaviour and to be able to display play behaviour.^{3,4,18} For the purpose of a good social development, while foals learn communication skills, it is recommended that foals grow up with their mother and other foals. Ideally, foals should be weaned from six months of age.^{27,35} From four months of age, gradual weaning allows the foal to be separated from its mother with as little stress as possible.^{24,25,26,35,36}

This means the foal is supplemented prior to weaning with the feed it will receive after weaning (limited concentrated feed, sufficient roughage/grass), and the foal is regularly separated from the mare for increasingly long periods of time. Foals should always be kept in a group with other foals during this process of being separated from their mother during and after weaning.

2. All horses must be able to move freely on a daily basis.

Free, daily movement is necessary to positively influence the physiological functioning of the locomotor and gastrointestinal systems. In addition, regular movement has a positive influence on horses' mental wellbeing.

Free movement means that the horse can move at its own discretion. It should not be hindered by humans in doing so and therefore should not carry out any activity with humans during free movement. When free movement is restricted, there is a risk of the rebound effect. This means that horses that receive little free movement are more difficult to handle when interacting with humans and have increased risk of injury, e.g. while grazing.^{9,10,33,34}

Free movement also means that horses should be able to run at least a short sprint while having the opportunity for visual contact with conspecifics. The distance they should be able to sprint across is at least 17.5 metres (five canter strides or seven horse lengths) for a warmblood.² At the same time, crowding should be avoided in the paddock and, of course, safety should be taken into account. This means that horses should be able to move freely on soft ground with a fence that is safe for horses. When several horses are placed together, there must be enough space for them to be able to avoid each other. This includes among others no dead ends, enough dry lying areas, enough feeding areas that cannot be (spatially) monopolised, enough passing areas.

Horses must never stay in their stalls for 24 consecutive hours or more, unless following a veterinary prescription.

A resting day for horses means that they must still have the possibility of free movement for several hours.



3. Horses should be fed good-quality roughage as basis of their diet.

The horse's gastrointestinal system is designed to take in small amounts of fibre-rich feed throughout the day. Therefore, roughage is the basis of the ration. The horse must not suffer from prolonged hunger or thirst.

Horses are steppe animals by nature, built to eat for most of the day. For their gastrointestinal system, it is still necessary that they eat small amounts of fibre-rich feed throughout the day. High-fibre feed means good quality roughage such as grass, hay or haylage. A horse's natural daily rhythm consists of repeating the cycle of 2–3 hours of eating and 1 hour of resting.^{8,12,13,18} This is reflected, among others, in the continuous production of gastric acid and the lack of a gallbladder. Horses need to chew fibrous roughage well. This releases saliva, which initiates digestion. In addition, alkaline saliva buffers the acidic gastric fluids, which ensures a balanced composition of the stomach contents. Due to the absence of a

gallbladder, bile is continuously released into the intestine regardless of the amount of intestinal contents. Therefore, the steady supply of small amounts of roughage mixes optimally with bile in the small intestine. Due to the fibre-rich properties of roughage, digestion is slow, and this is necessary for the prolonged and intensive digestion of cellulose. In addition, the mass of roughage in the intestine acts as water storage that can be called upon during exercise and warm weather.

Large amounts of concentrate feed change the composition of the food mass in the gut. This can disrupt the natural digestive processes and produce unwanted fermentation in the intestines, resulting in excessive gas formation.

The absence of prolonged hunger or thirst is a basic requirement for equine welfare. Therefore, it is necessary to offer appropriate food and water in a responsible way. In practice, this means that horses must be offered fresh water and roughage and should never spend more than six hours without roughage.^{12,13}

If horses are kept in group housing, great care must be taken to ensure that all animals in the group have adequate access to good-quality roughage. Similarly, to prevent obesity, dominant horses should not be overfed. Monitoring the nutritional status of all horses in the group is essential.¹⁹

Basic ration

To meet the physiological needs of horses, they must have almost continuous access to fresh drinking water, good quality roughage and a salt block. Roughage is the basis of an appropriate ration. Every horse should have around 1.5% of its body weight of dry-feed roughage available every day. A good rule in practice is around 2 kg of hay per 100 kg of body weight.^{12,13} If no concentrate is fed, it is necessary to supplement vitamins and minerals in the form of a feed supplement (e.g. a balancer).

Chewing is necessary to prepare the digestive system for the feed and it also provides distraction. The saliva released during chewing helps prevent gastric ulcers. Horses are less bored and this also results in less abnormal stable behaviour. Horses chew harder and longer on tough, fibrous roughage than on fine, soft roughage. Moreover, roughage with plenty of structure provides less energy, which makes it possible to feed more of it. This also promotes healthy chewing behaviour and good oral health. In this case, the type of roughage does not matter as long as this forage is suitable for horses. That means that the roughage is free of moulds, mycotoxins and/or spoilage, not too dusty, contains no poisonous plants and in normal quantities has no negative effect on the horse's health.

Water

Horses should always have access to fresh drinking water from a clean and properly functioning water trough. Tap water is preferable. If water comes from the property's own natural water ways or bore, it is essential that the water quality is checked at least annually. If, exceptionally, there is no access to water, it should never last for longer than 4 hours.¹⁹

If there is group housing, or multiple animals are grazing, there should be multiple water points, accessible from different sides. A water point is sometimes monopolised by a dominant animal or group of animals.²¹

Availability

The timing of feeding horses, with both roughage and concentrate, is important to ensure they are fed healthily. Horses should have access to roughage 24 hours a day. The guideline is that horses should never be without access to edible roughage for more than 6 hours. For example, in the event of a period of 10 hours between feedings of roughage, this requires the portion at the beginning of the 10-hour period to be so large, that it takes the animal at least 4 hours to eat it. Increasing the duration of feeding on roughage can be achieved by using a (double) hay net or a slow feeder or supplementing straw, as long as this does not exceed 30% of the total roughage.²⁸

Feeding and drinking troughs should be clean and accessible. If the feeding places of two adjacent stalls are next to each other, the partition must be closed at the level of the feeding places.²¹

Concentrate feed

Concentrates are supplementary feed and never form the basis of the ration. Their main function is to supplement any nutrient deficiencies of the ration based on good quality roughage.

The equine gastrointestinal system is built for 'stalky' grass, which contains no starch. Many concentrate feeds consist of grains and are rich in starch. A 600 kg horse should never be fed more than 2 kg of concentrate per feeding.²⁸ The guideline for starch is a maximum of 1 g per 1 kg body weight per feeding.²⁸ That means, for a 600 kg horse, there should be no more than 600 g of starch in the feed ration.

As concentrated feed on an empty stomach has a negative effect on digestion (increased risk of gastric ulcers), the first meal should consist of roughage, if the period without roughage was 4–6 hours. The advice is to feed concentrate only after the horse has been able to eat roughage for at least 30 minutes.

4. Horses must receive good healthcare and are only subject to physical procedures when a veterinary indication is present.

Veterinary examinations and treatments must always be done by or under the supervision of an equine veterinarian. Horses should thus receive the best possible care from a team of healthcare professionals, consisting of an equine veterinarian and, for example, a certified farrier, a certified dentist and a certified animal physiotherapist. All treatments, both preventive and curative, must always be in the horse's best interest.

Physical interventions that have a cosmetic purpose and/or unnecessarily affect the horse's welfare must be rejected by equine veterinarians.

Physical interventions include:

- a. Trimming whiskers and clipping outer ears**
 - Whiskers should not be shaved off. They are important for the horse in social contact and in exploring its surroundings.
 - Hairs in the outer ear should not be completely removed. These hairs protect the external ear canal.
- b. Docking tails**

Tail docking is not permitted. Legislation is clear on this. A horse with a docked tail is not allowed to compete.
- c. Shortening the withers**

Shortening the withers is not allowed.
- d. Removing microchips**

Removing working microchips is a serious form of fraud. Microchips play an important role in the identification and registration of equids.
- e. Neurectomy**

In principle, performing a (low) neurectomy is prohibited in the Netherlands.²⁹ Only a veterinarian can choose to perform this procedure in exceptional cases where removing pain is essential for that horse's welfare. The foot in question must then be monitored daily.
- f. Laryngeal hemiplegia (Recurrent laryngeal neuropathy)**

In principle, performing surgery for laryngeal hemiplegia is prohibited in the Netherlands.²⁹ A veterinarian can only decide to perform this procedure if the horse in question is so distressed that it cannot function properly.

Physical interventions necessary for the health and welfare of horses are allowed when performed and after prescription by veterinarians.

The (Dutch) law makes an exception for castration.¹⁵ Performing this surgery is reserved (by law) for veterinarians.

5. Horses and people work together harmoniously while both experience this collaboration positively.

What do we mean by training horses?

The word training, in relation to horses, covers various aspects. In essence, all efforts we demand from horses in the relationship between humans and horses can be seen as a form of training. When handling horses, their species-related innate behaviour, also known as instinct, is important. In addition, new behaviour is learned and refined through training. This new behaviour is a consequence of learning. In horses, learning can be seen as a relatively permanent change in observable behaviour. This is due to experience gained or interaction that has taken place with the environment. The forms of learning most commonly used in the horse are habituation, and classical and operant conditioning (connection between a stimulus or behaviour and its consequence). If each form of training is applied in a systematic way, training matches the horse's natural way of learning and the horse remains mentally and physically healthy.

Condemnation of mistreatment and reduced welfare

As guardians of the horse's health and welfare, veterinarians must act proactively in all cases where they encounter mistreatment during work with horses. When using horses, mistreatment includes the following events:³⁰

- Excessive use of hand or leg aids, spurs or whip;
- Training a horse at a level the animal is clearly not physically or mentally capable of;
- Training a tired or sick/injured horse.

Veterinarians will also speak out in cases of other manifestations of impaired welfare, such as:

- Excessively prolonged extreme postures during training or in the stable;
- Obvious imbalance between the rider's weight and the horse's physical condition.³¹

6. Training aids should be used sparingly and only to promote the horse's natural movement and posture.

During training sessions

In general, as few (training) aids as possible should be used in addition to the basic tack. If these aids are used, it must be done with respect for the anatomy, level of training and condition of the horse. Any aids must be applied only by well-trained and experienced handlers.

None of these (training) aids must harm a horse's wellbeing. Mistreatment of horses by natural or artificial (training) aids will not be tolerated. Use of aids is only allowed to clarify instructions for the horse and under no circumstances to punish.

Veterinarians will act proactively in all cases where they come into contact with mistreatment during the work with horses. When training horses and during competitions, mistreatment includes the following events:

- Signs of blood/damage to the skin or mucous membranes caused, for example, by bit(s), spurs or other tack;
- Excessively tight noseband, causing pain and making breathing difficult;
- The use of equipment that deliberately causes pain, for example; applying electric shocks.

During competitions

During competitions and inspections, horses may only be presented with approved tack. The presence of forbidden (training) aids and the incorrect use of permitted (training) aids must be actively monitored by organisers and the rider must be penalised in case of observed infringements.

7. Equestrian sports must be exclusively conducted with healthy horses without the use of unauthorised drugs.

Fit-to-compete

The physical condition of a horse should ideally be assessed by an experienced veterinarian. During international competitions, participation is accepted only after the horse has been approved by the veterinarian (vet check). The sensitivity of the horse's limbs must be checked regularly. If the horse is not fit to participate in competition or inspection, it must be examined and/or treated. The horse must then be given enough time to recover. At competitions governed by

the FEI (Fédération Equestre Internationale), a FEI official veterinarian (Veterinary Delegate) is present throughout the competition to check the health and welfare of the horses on the competition grounds. If health or welfare is impaired (intentionally or unintentionally), the veterinarian on duty will report to the Ground Jury and the horse may be disqualified.

Use of drugs

During competitions and inspections, the horse must be presented free of unauthorised drugs. This concerns any substance that can affect the horse's condition. To regulate this, sports and racing federations have drawn up regulations and listed the various substances. These sports federations also carry out regular drug sampling on participating horses. If unauthorised substances are found, the horse-rider combination is disqualified and the situation is assessed by a tribunal. In most cases, the rider is suspended for a certain period of time. (Veterinary) medication must be solely administered to promote the horse's health. In this context, veterinarians are committed to prevent unhealthy horses from entering competitions or inspections.

8. Horses must be transported responsibly.

European guidelines have been established for the transport of horses. This whitepaper explicitly refers to those guidelines.³² In case of temperatures above 30 degrees Celsius (or several consecutive days of 27 degrees Celsius or higher), the Dutch protocol on extreme weather conditions for horses applies in the Netherlands.¹⁷

9. Animal health and welfare must be key when breeding horses.

Veterinary management of equine reproduction must be done with respect for the horse's physiology and welfare.

Sometimes animals are born with an unusual appearance, such as a dented nose, an abnormal neck or dwarfism. If an animal develops health or welfare problems as a result, a veterinarian will try to alleviate them. Veterinarians are opposed to the deliberate breeding and buying or selling of animals with external features that are harmful to animal welfare and animal health. Veterinarians have obtained good results in advising studbooks on breeding with healthy horses.

Equine veterinarians believe that:

- Animal health and welfare must be key when breeding animals;
- It is desirable to register health and welfare problems per breed;
- Exhibiting animals with external features detrimental to animal welfare and animal health should be prohibited.

10. All horses deserve a good quality of life and a dignified end of life.

Although horses can live for more than 30 years, they generally 'retire' much earlier. There are two choices after a horse's retirement: either it is kept and cared for until its death (e.g. as a companion animal or in less demanding work), or euthanised or slaughtered (provided that this is still possible). 'Retired' horses can usually still have a good life, but are also at risk for reduced welfare when owners can no longer afford or want to pay the cost of care. Owning a horse comes with the responsibility of providing for its needs. Neglect and unnecessary suffering are unacceptable. It is important that owners clearly understand the obligations they have towards the horse when they own one, even as the animal ages. It is also important that owners can properly assess whether the animal is in pain. Both topics require research and education, and veterinarians can advise on this.

In addition, it is useful to start a conversation about end of life. An equine veterinarian can explain when and why termination of life should be seen as inevitable.

Summary:

- Equine veterinarians help horse owners to maximise the health and welfare of older horses;
- In the later days of a horse's life, its needs should be respected in terms of health and welfare;
- Termination of life should be performed in a respectful manner, without pain, without fear and by accepted means. This applies equally to both euthanasia and slaughter, making termination of life welfare-neutral.³⁷

EQUINE VETERINARIANS FOCUSING ON EQUINE HEALTH AND WELFARE



- **Equine veterinarians are the trusted advisors for horse owners and horse lovers;**
- **Equine welfare is always prioritized when giving (veterinary) advice;**
- **Equine veterinarians contribute to a horse population that is both physically and mentally healthy, with optimal welfare. Equine veterinarians are open to innovations and new knowledge, and treatments evolve by new insights.**
- **Equine veterinarians have a proactive attitude towards horses' health and welfare.**

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