

# Association of Irish Riding Clubs

## Winter care advice for your horse

The Association of Irish Riding Clubs has put this advice together to assist its members in looking after their horses in these extreme weather conditions.

Though horses adapt well to changes in temperatures, there are certain things to watch out for during this cold spell:

### Feeding / Forage

The best heat source for Horses is extra feed, particularly hay or haylage. So provide forage on an ad lib basis throughout the day. It's not advisable to increase your horses hard feed intake as it may provide too much energy and could increase the risk of colic.

If your horses are living out in a field in a group, ensure to leave extra piles of hay than there are horses to ensure each gets its fair share.

If your horse is living out and is not fed any hard feed, provide access to a mineral lick to ensure their dietary needs are met.

If you can't exercise your horse, it is advisable to cut down on hard feed and build up your horse's intake of forage.

### Water Supply

Ensure your horse has access to an adequate supply of water as with an increased intake of forage, they need water at all times to ensure healthy digestion.

Water trough often freeze so check it daily and make sure any ice is broken and removed. Pouring a kettle of boiling water into a trough will help to stave off the ice. Another trick is to place a few apples or a tennis ball into the trough as the horse bobbing for the apple will help prevent it freezing over but this may not work in extreme weather.

Use a rubber bucket instead of a plastic bucket as if it freezes inside, your plastic bucket is more likely to shatter.

Again pour a kettle full of boiling water into water buckets last thing at night to prevent them freezing.

## **Shelter / Rugging**

Stabled horses generally a rug as they are not able to move around and keep warm like those who live out can.

Unless your horse is very thin-skinned or clipped, they cope very well with dry, cold weather. However, combined with wet conditions, they'll need protection.

If your horse is living out, make sure they have good natural shelter or a field shelter so they can get out of the rain. A south facing, three sided shelter will help them through the roughest of weather. It should be large enough for all horses in the field.

You should check on your horse at least once a day for signs of illness or injury. Sick horses deteriorate quicker in severe weather.

## **Exercise**

If you can exercise safely in these cold conditions, you should consider using an exercise rug or quarter sheet to keep your horse warm.

Spraying a layer of oil or Vaseline on the underside of horses' feet can help prevent snow balling up in the feet. You should always carry a hoof pick and pick out horses' feet as often as possible.

Before riding in an outdoor arena, check the surface on foot so you can ride safely and accordingly.

Avoid icy patches, and remember that frozen ground - even if it is not icy - is as hard as concrete.

While out hacking, be aware that the noise of ice crunching under car tyres can frighten a young or inexperienced horse, so only hack if it is safe to do so.

After exercise, it is very important to keep your horse warm, especially if they are clipped. Horses can easily catch a chill after hard work if they are not rugged to prevent them from losing heat too quickly and to keep them from catching a chill whilst still sweaty. It is also important to warm down properly after exercise.