

Nail penetration of the horse's foot

Foot penetration with a nail

Occasionally a horse is unlucky enough to stand on a nail or other sharp object which penetrates through the sole of the foot. The result of such an injury can range from being a life-threatening injury with tendon or joint infection, to just causing the horse a bit of bruising in its sole. The outcome will depend on where the nail has penetrated the foot and how deeply it went in.

What do I do if my horse has stood on a nail?

- Generally it is best for the vet to see the horse with the nail still in its foot. Often the best way to achieve this is to keep the horse standing on an unbedded solid floor. It may sometimes be possible to pad the foot so that no pressure is on the nail when the horse places it's foot to the floor.
- If you have to remove the nail to move your horse or to make it comfortable then please try to remember exactly where the nail went in, what direction it was facing and how deeply it was embedded. It may be useful to take a photo prior to removing the nail to show its position and also keep the nail to show us how deeply it was embedded.
- If you remove the nail, scrub the horse's foot clean and then cover with a poultice.



X-ray of a horse with a wire marker inserted at site of nail penetration

When do I call the vet?

- We would recommend that any horse that has suffered from a nail penetration is seen as an emergency by a vet.

How will the vet help my horse?

- If the nail is still in place the vet will use its position to decide whether to remove it or to take an x-ray with the nail in situ.
- If the nail has been removed the vet will try to identify the tract from which it was removed. A probe can be used to determine how deeply and in what direction the nail penetrated. From this information and from the degree of lameness the vet will assess what structures inside the hoof may have been damaged by the nail.

- Sometimes x-rays may be taken with the probe in place to look how close the nail was to the bones within the foot.
- The outcome for a horse with nail penetration will depend on what structures are damaged by the nail. Some cases will require just paring of the foot, pain relief and poulticing. In more complicated situations the horse may need to be referred for contrast study x-rays, even an MRI and sometimes surgery.
- Prompt referral of the more complicated cases will improve the chances of success but despite this not all cases will have a favourable outcome.

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