

VETERINARIAN'S GUIDE TO  
Equestrian Competition  
Official Duties



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# AAEP POLICY ON OFFICIAL VETERINARY SERVICE

The role and responsibility of the official veterinarians for competitions established as official policy by the American Association of Equine Practitioners is as follows:

- The official veterinarian will serve as a professional consultant on veterinary matters to advise competition management, the stewards and the judges.
- The official veterinarian will advise the management, cooperating persons and agencies concerning the care and welfare of the horses present at the show or event and will provide veterinary care to affiliated horses when the need arises.
- The official veterinarian will utilize their professional training to advise associated personnel on veterinary-related matters. These consultations will align with immediate medical needs of the horse, the spirit of competition and fairness of sport.
- The official veterinarian will not assume, nor be expected to assume the role, responsibilities or prerogatives of the management, judges, stewards or other regulatory agencies. To this extent, the official veterinarian will serve as an unbiased advocate for the horse, with the horse's best interest at the center of their decision-making process.

# COMPETITION VETERINARIAN RESPONSIBILITIES

1. The official competition veterinarian is contracted by and responsible to show management. Their principal function is to serve as a professional consultant on all veterinary matters pertaining to the show. With respect to shows sanctioned by one of the governing bodies, the rule books outline the various duties of the competition veterinarian.
2. The competition veterinarian may be asked to treat sick and injured horses on the show grounds. In doing so, they are hired by and responsible to the horse owner. The show veterinarian should function as a first line of defense and will refer cases to a hospital facility as needed.
3. Except for competitions sanctioned by the International Federation for Equestrian Sports (FEI), most competition veterinarians are expected to function as both the treating veterinarian and officiating veterinarian. It is important to note that these two roles are, at times, in conflict with each other and the veterinarian must be ethically prepared for this scenario.
4. The competition veterinarian has a responsibility to understand the regulations of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (the Horse Protection Act and interstate travel requirements) and the regulatory requirements of the state where the competition is held (a valid state license is required).
5. Drug testing is performed by most associations and breed organizations. Blood and urine samples are gathered by or under the supervision of a veterinarian. Contractual agreements govern the services required of veterinarians serving in this capacity. They are responsible to the organization providing the testing procedure. Rules governing the collection of samples vary between organizations and are outlined when a veterinarian's services are contracted. The official competition veterinarian is, in most cases, not the drug testing veterinarian.
6. Veterinary responsibilities are outlined in the rule books of governing bodies. These rules may vary from show to show. Consequently, the competition veterinarian must have a thorough understanding of the competition rules. Membership in the governing body for which one is officiating is highly recommended and is important to help the veterinarian stay abreast of the rule changes that occur from time to time.

# GUIDELINES FOR OFFICIAL COMPETITION VETERINARIANS

1. Familiarize yourself with the sanctioning organization governing the competition. Understand and strictly adhere to all applicable rules of the organization, especially all drug and medication rules. The United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) outlines veterinarians' responsibilities under GR1204. (<https://www.usef.org/forms-pubs/Txh5en10Fpk/gr12-competition-officials-employees>)
2. Arrive at the competition before the official starting time. Competitions that require a veterinarian to be on the grounds cannot start the event until the official competition vet is there. Being late is unacceptable.
3. Determine how you will communicate with the competition officials. Many shows will provide a two-way radio; others will contact you via your mobile phone.
4. Do not accept duties or responsibilities that are not specifically those of a veterinarian or of the veterinary position in which you are serving. It is important to cooperate with all competition officials and exhibitors but not assume or accept responsibilities other than those assigned to your position as the competition veterinarian.
5. When called into the show ring to observe a horse for soundness, it should be done inconspicuously. It is important that the competitors and spectators do not know which horse is being questioned for soundness. Erroneous conclusions based on your actions can be detrimental for the owner of the horse.
6. Decisions about a horse's soundness should never be discussed with anyone other than the owner/agent or show management for both professional and legal reasons. The competition steward should be notified of an exhibitor who becomes unnecessarily argumentative.
7. Discuss the soundness of competing horses only with the judge and then, only when requested. It is likely you will be misquoted by any statement you make regarding a horse's condition. If a public statement is requested, provide only factual veterinary information related to the event.
8. As the treating veterinarian, provide appropriate treatment for all horses with conditions that affect their wellbeing and their ability to compete.
9. "Scratch Certificates" should be issued only when a horse for reasons of injury or health is not in satisfactory physical condition to show. There are no other considerations.
10. Promptly provide care for horses with fractures, freak accidents, acute colic and other emergency situations in the show ring and on the show grounds.
11. If responsible for after-hours emergency service, provide the competition management with contact information for the practice providing this care.
12. Veterinarians officiating at competitions are entitled to an appropriate level of compensation based on the scope of their services. The terms of compensation should be negotiated

in advance of the competition. If it is preferred to donate the veterinarian's services, it is recommended that the competition management compensate the veterinarian in full and that the veterinarian, or their practice, donate back to the competition. This recognizes the value of the veterinarian's time and service and meets the requirement of donating to a charitable organization.

13. The veterinarian will not drink alcoholic beverages or use any medication that might impair judgment. Doing so affects how the veterinarian is perceived while officiating and may affect medical decision-making skills.
14. The competition veterinarian will be well-served by keeping the horse's welfare as the highest priority. This upholds the values of the owner, rider, trainer and sanctioning body.

# BIOSECURITY

Whenever large groups of horses assemble, it is an eventuality that an infectious and contagious threat will occur. The best way to deal with this is to have a biosecurity plan in place in advance of the event.

**Develop a Biosecurity Plan that provides guidance to competition management on the following key areas:**

1. Healthy Horse Entry Requirements – Specifically, the appropriate risk-based recommendations for vaccinations and health certifications or health declarations.
2. Horse Health Monitoring onsite – The temperature monitoring and clinical observation of horses.
3. Basic Biosecurity Measures – The protocols for competition management for maintaining a healthy competition venue from cleaning of communal areas to stall cleaning to manure maintenance.
4. Sick Horse Reporting and Response – The sick horse reporting and response protocol for competitions to enact in response to a sick horse.
5. Isolation Plan and Response – The development of a plan which identifies isolation stabling plan and sets forth guidance for implementation.
6. Maintain Infectious Disease Situational Awareness – Utilize the Equine Disease Communication Center to maintain situational awareness of infectious disease occurrences and for educational resources for infectious diseases.

**Goals of your Biosecurity Plan:**

1. Ensure healthy horses enter and compete.
2. Ensure safe biosecure competition venue.
3. Immediately identify, isolate and treat a suspect infectious disease case.
4. Enable business continuity in the event of an infectious disease incursion.
5. Encourage routine biosecurity to protect and promote equine health at an equine event.

**The following sites offer advice for formulating such a plan:**

[AAEP General Biosecurity Guidelines](#)  
[CDFA Biosecurity Toolkit for Equine Events](#)  
[EDCC Biosecurity for Events](#)  
[USEF Biosecurity Guidelines](#)

# TREATMENT OF THE ACUTELY INJURED HORSE

While veterinarians are well trained in handling horse-related emergencies, a quick review of procedures and protocols is recommended before assuming the role of the official competition veterinarian. More information on emergency preparedness can be found at [FEI Crisis Management Plan](#).

## Develop a pre-emptive emergency plan prior to the start of the event:

- Communicate clearly with show officials/ appropriate personnel to pre-emptively establish an emergency plan that includes:
  - A place to stand or park emergency vehicle near arena
  - An ambulance and driver to remove an injured or deceased horse accompanied by a protocol to do so
  - Drawing samples for drug testing before medicating and the chain of command for such samples
  - A private working area
  - A plan for communicating with media, including identification of spokesperson
- List the personnel who be involved in the care of the acutely injured horse and delegate specific tasks to be accomplished by each person in the event of an emergency

- Have your vehicle or medication bag readily accessible\*
- Have a list prepared with local contacts:
  - Closest referral hospital
  - A service to remove or transport a deceased horse
  - Local laboratory and arrangements for sample pickup

## Goals:

- Be prepared to work quickly to attend to a horse's needs: stabilize and remove the horse from the public eye as quickly as possible.
- Evaluate the surroundings: Is the horse safe? Limit offers of help from bystanders.
- Sedate, stabilize, remove and treat.
- Can the horse move safely or is an ambulance necessary?
- Move the horse to a quiet work area.
- Establish ownership of horse and a responsible person for decision making as soon as the horse is stable.

\* See Suggested Veterinary Equipment and Medications on page 8.

# SUGGESTED VETERINARY EQUIPMENT AND MEDICATIONS

## MEDICATIONS:

- ☐ Butorphanol
- ☐ Detomidine
- ☐ Dexamethasone
- ☐ Diazepam
- ☐ Euthanasia solution (250 to 300 ml Pentobarbital; alternatively, MgSO<sub>4</sub> and a short-term anesthetic)
- ☐ Flunixin meglumine
- ☐ Ketamine
- ☐ Lidocaine: Pre-loaded 3 ml syringe, 25/27 ga needle (block for catheter or tracheotomy)
- ☐ Xylazine

## EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES:

- ☐ Alcohol & scrub
- ☐ Bandage scissors
- ☐ Blue Towels (to cover eyes)
- ☐ Bucket (steel or plastic)
- ☐ Cast material
- ☐ Catheter: 14 gauge 6"
- ☐ Clippers
- ☐ Cotton: dry, pound
- ☐ Duct Tape
- ☐ Ear plugs for horses
- ☐ 4" Elasticon x 6
- ☐ Flashlight
- ☐ Fluids: Sterile saline (500mL or 1L bottles or bags); Heparinized saline: 12 cc; IV Fluids (lactated ringers, Multisol, etc; 3L or 5L bags)
- ☐ Gloves: exam and sterile
- ☐ Gauze: large brown gauze; 4" Conform gauze
- ☐ Hand sanitizer and disinfectant
- ☐ Halter, lead rope & lead chain
- ☐ Imaging equipment to include digital radiography and ultrasound
- ☐ Injection cap
- ☐ Large Combi-roll bandages x 6
- ☐ Nasal swabs for sampling
- ☐ Nasogastric tube and pump
- ☐ Needles: 18-, 14- and 20-gauge needles, 1.5 inches in length
- ☐ Needle holders already loaded with 2-0
- ☐ Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- ☐ PDS to secure catheter
- ☐ Scalpels
- ☐ Splints: Kimzey splint, PVC Pipe splint
- ☐ Sterile laceration pack
- ☐ Sterile Surgipads
- ☐ Stethoscope
- ☐ Super Glue
- ☐ Syringes: 60 ml syringes; 20 ml, 12 ml, and 3 ml syringes
- ☐ Thermometer
- ☐ Tracheotomy tube
- ☐ Twitch
- ☐ Vet wrap
- ☐ Water; hose & spray nozzle (if access to clean water is within proximity)
- ☐ White Tape

# DEFINITION AND CLASSIFICATION OF LAMENESS

With such extremes of lameness possible, a lameness grading system has been developed by the AAEP to aid in both communication and record-keeping. The scale ranges from zero to five, with zero being no perceptible lameness, and five being most extreme.

The AAEP guidelines explain the grading system this way:

- 0** Lameness not perceptible under any circumstances.
- 1** Lameness is difficult to observe and is not consistently apparent, regardless of circumstances (e.g., under saddle, circling, inclines, hard surface, etc.).
- 2** Lameness is difficult to observe at a walk or when trotting in a straight line but consistently apparent under certain circumstances (e.g., weight-carrying, circling, inclines, hard surface, etc.).
- 3** Lameness is consistently observable at a trot under all circumstances.
- 4** Lameness is obvious at a walk.
- 5** Lameness produces minimal weight bearing in motion and/or at rest or a complete inability to move.

# THE COLLAPSING AND FALLING HORSE

*Definitions: A collapse is defined as a fall to the ground with no apparent cause at any time.<sup>1</sup> A horse has fallen when, ridden or unriden, the shoulder and haunch on the same side have touched the ground or an obstacle and the ground.<sup>2</sup>*

Competition management, the steward or technical delegate, must be informed of a collapsing horse within three hours of the event.

The competition veterinarian may be asked to examine the horse who has collapsed. If so, the veterinarian will be hired and compensated by the governing body and will be required to submit a report about the condition of the affected horse. If an approved testing veterinarian is present at the competition, they may be asked to collect and submit samples for drug testing. If a testing veterinarian is not available, the competition veterinarian may be asked to

collect and submit samples in a manner consistent with the governing body's regulations.

A postmortem on horses who have died while competing or at a competition venue may be required. For USEF-sanctioned events, the competition veterinarian can contact the Chief Administrator of the Equine Drugs and Medication Program at 800-633-2472 to confirm the need for a postmortem. A postmortem should be conducted at a veterinary pathology laboratory. Blood and urine samples should be drawn in the event the Federation would like them tested.

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<sup>1</sup>*Collapse:* [https://files.usef.org/assets/p1\\_rWnrB\\_g0/gr08-conductofcompetitions.pdf](https://files.usef.org/assets/p1_rWnrB_g0/gr08-conductofcompetitions.pdf).

<sup>2</sup>*Fall:* <https://www.usef.org/forms-pubs/enHpt47kbSM/gr1-definitions-governance>.



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