

AEC STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

SOP No:	23
SOP	Horses
Scientific Name:	<i>Equus caballus</i>
Category:	2, 3, 4, 5
Approval Level:	Category 2: School Principal may delegate Category 3: School Principal may NOT delegate Category 4: Animal Ethics Committee Category 5: Animal Ethics Committee
Authority:	Government Schools – Department for Education and Childhood Development Animal Ethics Committee Independent and Catholic Schools – Non-Government Schools Animal Ethics Committee
Authority Approval Date:	1 August 2010
Last update	22 January 2019
Disclaimer:	<i>This document may be updated at any time. You should check the web site regularly to ensure that you are meeting the most recent recommendations. If you note any concerns with the information provided (inadequate, incorrect) please contact the relevant AEC</i>
Licensing Requirement:	Not applicable
Compliance Requirement:	The keeping of this species requires approval from the School Principal or the AEC. It is recommended that this Standard Operating Procedure be followed as a minimum in the provision of appropriate care and housing for this species.

General Information: There is a range of breeds in use in Australia. These can be classified according to activity:

- Olympic disciplines – eg: Thoroughbred/Warmblood
- Hacking/show ring-eg: Thoroughbred/Pony/Arab;
- Racing- eg., Thoroughbred and Standardbred;
- Farm work- for example, Stockhorse; and
- Endurance riding - for example, Arab.

Physical Attributes:

- **Size:** at the withers varies between breeds. Measured in hands (1 hand = 100 mm). Shetland, about 8 hands, draught breed, 18-20 hands)
- **Weight:** varies with breed – for example, 130 kg (miniature horse) – 900 kg (Percheron)
- **Age at adult size:** 4 years, but variations between breeds
- **Average life span:** 25-35 years
- **Weight at birth:** Shetland 30 kg, draught 100 kg
- **Gestation period:** 320-345 days (average 335)
- **Number of offspring:** Normally one. Twins are rare and associated with low survival rates.
- **Range of breeding ages:** mares 3-15 years
- **Weaning age:** 6-9 months
- **Body temperature:** 38°C
- **Heart rate:** 30-40 beats/minute
- **Respiration rate:** 12 breaths/minute. Variations between individuals

Behaviour: These points should always be noted when considering the behaviour of horses:

- Horses are naturally gregarious and, as such, possess a strong herd instinct.
- Horses may develop abnormal behaviours, such as weaving or wind-sucking, when kept under unnatural conditions that involve

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social isolation or low-roughage diets. Weaving is lateral swaying of the head over the stable door or some other barrier. Wind-sucking and crib-biting may be performed while grasping a surface and involve contraction of the horses' neck muscles and audible grunting. These behaviours tend to persist even when the affected animals are managed more naturally.

- Horses in the domestic state tend to find security in familiar surroundings. This can be likened to the security that they would derive from being members of the herd in the wild.
- Horses are essentially nervous and excitable, so there is a strong instinctive flight response.
- Horses have individual temperaments and this should be considered when assessing behaviour.
- Horses are naturally nervous and suspicious of anything new or strange, sudden movements and loud noises.
- Horses kept in confined areas, such as stables and small yards, often develop behavioural problems because of frustration and lack of stimulation.
- In the wild, horses move to keep in touch with one another. When they are not free to do this, they tend to develop abnormal behaviour, such as weaving.
- Horses have a small stomach and need to eat little and often.
- Horses that are being fed cereals should be fed small amounts at a time and be offered high-fibre forages or they will tend to develop abnormal behaviours such as crib-biting and wind-sucking.

Selection of horses: Horses chosen for use in schools and colleges should have calm temperaments and be easy to handle. Horses are very much individuals and the restraint used to handle one horse may not be suitable for another. All horses used in schools and colleges should be capable of being restrained adequately with a headstall and lead rope.

Environment:

A horse kept at pasture will require at least one hectare to provide adequate feed. (This will be highly variable, depending upon pasture quality). Supplementation may be required, particularly in summer and winter.

Pastured horses keep themselves exercised, but horses that are stabled or kept in restrictive yards for long periods require regular daily exercise. The recommended minimum size for a stable is 3.5 m x 3.5 m (3 m x 3 m for ponies), with a height of at least 2 500 mm, and for a yard, 5 m x 5 m, with some form of shelter.

Small yards should have post-and-rail fencing using timber, steel pipes or steel posts. Barbed wire, prefabricated fencing and high-tensile fencing can cause severe injury to horses and should not be used. Horses should be able to see fencing material easily. Horses can cope with most temperature extremes experienced in Western Australia if they have adequate water and some form of shelter. Older horses or those stabled and recently turned out to pasture may require rugging with lined waterproof rugs in cold weather.

Natural light is adequate for horses. Experienced stock people using horses for show purposes or to influence oestrus in breeding mares sometimes employ artificial light. It is unlikely that this need would

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arise in schools or college situations.

Shelter from heat, wind and rain, provided by belts of trees or stables, is required. Stables should be well ventilated and free from draughts, and in paddocks, horses need an area protected from the wind. Bedding is only needed in a stable and should be deep enough to prevent leg injuries. Straw, wood shavings or any absorbent material is suitable, provided that the horse does not eat it.

Remove dirty bedding from stables at least once a day. To help control worms, manure should be removed from paddocks.

Feeding:

As horses are unable to digest low-quality feeds efficiently, they should be provided with good-quality feeds at all times. Factors such as individual tastes, age, size and the amount of work done by horses will influence their feed requirements. Mature horses not in work can be maintained on pasture if it is of high quality throughout the year. Supplementary feed for horses usually consists of roughages such as legumes, cereal chaffs and hay and concentrates in the form of grains such as oats, barley and corn, pellets and protein meals.

Horses will generally eat dry matter equivalent to about 1.5 to 2.5 per cent of their body weight per day. If the quantity or quality of pasture is inadequate, supplementary feeding will be necessary.

Unlimited access to feed is allowed only when horses are at pasture. If supplementary feed is supplied, they should be fed at least twice a day. Horses have small stomachs, so small amounts, fed more often, are preferable to large amounts given less frequently.

High-fibre feed should always be available. Lucerne hay is a useful roughage for horses, supplying all the nutritional requirements for a horse not in work. Horses are far more sensitive to their feed than ruminant animals. Any changes in diet should be made gradually, over eight to ten days. This minimises the risk of colic, especially if introducing grain or changing grain types or quantities. Do not feed mouldy feed. Beware of poisonous plants, in particular those that are palatable to horses. Low-fibre grains should be avoided unless treated: for example, barley should be boiled or steam rolled.

A horse may drink 25 L - 45 L of water per day. Water and troughs should be clean and free from contamination. Supply water on demand, except after strenuous exercise, when the water should have the chill taken off it and be given in limited quantities until the horse has cooled off. Horses that are limited in their access to water tend to gorge themselves, possibly resulting in colic.

Disease prevention:

Disease control methods and internal and external parasite control programs should be developed in consultation with veterinarians or the Department of Agriculture. All activities must be documented in the appropriate records.

Breeding:

Handling:

Horses should be approached in quiet, kind way and handled in a firm, non-hesitant manner. Schools and colleges should choose horses with calm temperaments that require minimal restraint to perform activities. Many require only a headstall and lead rope to carry out all activities performed in schools.

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Hygiene:

Signs of illness:

Stock health should be monitored daily, or preferably more often. The first sign noticed is often a change in the horses' natural demeanour. They be listless or lethargic. Closer examinations may show variations in:

- body temperature;
- gastrointestinal functions, such as diarrhoea, weight loss or loss of appetite;
- urogenital functions, e.g. abortion, infertility or abnormal discharges; or
- respiratory functions, such as persistent coughing, gasping or panting.

There may be evidence of:

- skin conditions, such as lesions or abnormal growths;
- a tucked-up appearance, stiff gait, abnormal posture, patchy coat or loss of hair;
- excessive scratching or rubbing; or
- swollen joints or lameness

A failure to thrive or grow is another sign of illness.

Common ailments include colic or internal parasites.

Treatments:

If the cause of ill-health cannot be identified and corrected, assistance should be sought from veterinarians who are familiar with horses. Treatments must be documented in the appropriate records

Euthanasia:

When an illness or injury is such that recovery is unlikely then the animal must be euthanased by a veterinarian. Any death must be reported to the Animal Ethics Committee using the appropriate form (see section relating to ADVERSE EVENTS). Forms are available on the relevant websites – see contact details below.

Disposal/fate planning:

Horses can be sold privately, at auction or consigned to abattoirs. Carcasses must be disposed of in accordance with local council regulations.

Holiday and weekend care:

Horses need to be monitored, checked daily and fed regularly over weekends and holiday periods.

Approved activities:

Observation, breeding, farming

Resources:

Websites:

www.pir.sa.gov.au
www.sardi.sa.gov.au
www.rspcawa.asn.au