

# ***DEHYDRATION***

**Dehydration can be a serious problem for horses and ponies especially those suffering from illnesses. If you suspect dehydration, you can easily check your horse's hydration status. Although the tests are somewhat general, they can be valuable.**

**The most common test you can perform is called "skin-tent test." As the skin becomes dehydrated it loses its elasticity. In a dehydrated horse, if the skin is pulled up, or tented, it will snap back to the pre-pinch position slower than usual. It should be performed in an area that has constant tension such as the point of the shoulder.**

**Normally, the skin should snap back in a few seconds. Although older horses tend to lose the natural elasticity to the skin and it can take longer for their skin to return to place.**

**Knowing the normal time span for your horse or pony's skin can be a useful test of hydration status.**

**In addition to the skin-tent test, it is helpful to note the degree of moistness of the mucous membranes of the mouth. Another indication of dehydration is dry or tacky mucous membranes.**

**A further indication of dehydration is the time it takes for the colour at the pressure point to change from white back to pink after pressing on the horse or pony's gums.**

**Also, significant dehydration is probable if the horse's eyes appear to be sunken into their sockets and have lost the lustre of the outer surface of the cornea. Depression and an elevated heart rate are additional, although non-specific, signs of dehydration.**

**Dehydration can result from a variety of events including illness, travel, deprivation of water and sweating.**

**Show, especially performance, horses and ponies can lose a substantial amount of body water (as well as electrolytes) as they sweat. It is important to make an effort to prevent dehydration from occurring. Horses and ponies can even become mildly to moderately dehydrated while travelling to a show.**

**If the horse does not drink well while travelling or does not like the new water at the competition site, then its water intake might be considerably reduced and dehydration will have started prior to the start of competition. If you have a horse that is fussy about its water, you might need to bring water from home.**

**A horse or pony that has been deprived of water for several days should not be allowed to drink large quantities of water all at once. Small quantities water should be allowed every few hours until the animal has had its fill and then it can be allowed unlimited access to water.**

**A severely dehydrated horse or pony should receive veterinary attention without delay, regardless of the cause. It will most likely require intravenous fluids or water via a stomach tube. Dehydrated horses and ponies may also have blood-electrolyte abnormalities that will require correction.**