

# Transforming the diagnosis of equine colic

December 12 2012

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Colic is the number one killer of horses. But one of the difficulties faced by vets is differentiating between a mild case and a potentially life threatening case that is in its early stages.

Experts from The University of Nottingham's School of Veterinary Medicine and Science are carrying out a survey looking at how equine colic [cases](#) first present to vets, how they are diagnosed and what the outcomes are. The aim of this evidence based study is to establish a set of guidelines which they hope will transform the [diagnosis](#) of this potentially fatal condition.

Dr Sarah Freeman, an expert in equine surgery, said: "We don't just want to hear about the difficult surgical cases. No matter how mild the case is we want to hear from veterinary surgeons across the country. "Most of the research so far has focused on surgical and hospital based cases. Very little work has been done on the first assessment of colic. The

critical thing is to identify the danger signs in cases which need to be seen very quickly. By doing that we will be able to develop a standard set of guidelines of things to do and the specific warning signs to look out for in certain types of colic."

## **Online colic survey**

Although most cases of equine colic can be treated and less than 10% of cases are severe enough to require surgery, it is one of the conditions horse owners most dread.

The research team is hoping to enrol veterinary surgeons from across the country to help gather information on 1000 cases. So far nearly 80 vets have registered to take part, but more are needed. They are being asked to participate in the survey by completing online survey or paper forms about the cases they see.

The website also has links to other sources of information on colic and will have regular updates on the progress of the project and what's new in the literature.

## **'Out in the field' diagnosis is critical**

There are already [surveillance](#) schemes for grass sickness and laminitis. What is needed now is as big a picture as possible of colic from across the UK.

The study is being carried out by Laila Issaoui a PhD student at the vet school. She said: "We are specifically looking at first presentation and evaluation of colic. Diagnosis relies on first opinion 'out in the field diagnosis' from vets who can be called out any time of day or night and in all weathers to attend [horses](#) with this potentially fatal condition. We

want to develop some of the work that has already been carried out here at the Nottingham vet school on the early [warning signs](#) of colic to ensure horse owners and vets can recognise critical cases as early as possible."

The results of the study will be shared with horse owners and vets to make sure critical cases are identified early to improve chances of survival. Dr Freeman and Laila Issaouli are asking horse owners to help by encouraging their own vets to participate in this project which could save the life of their much loved horse.

**More information:** [www.colicsurvey.com/](http://www.colicsurvey.com/)

Provided by University of Nottingham

Citation: Transforming the diagnosis of equine colic (2012, December 12) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-12-diagnosis-equine-colic.html>

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