
Hot Weather Policy - Horses

Effective 1 November 2009

Purpose:

This Policy is intended to provide guidance to the thoroughbred racing industry in order to protect the welfare of and minimize the effects on horses racing at ALL South Australian racecourses and training at venues during hot weather.

Preamble:

A common ailment observed in horses as a consequence of hot weather is heat stress. Most horses easily adjust to conditions of high heat and/or humidity. In general, thoroughbred races are conducted over relatively short distances, so exertion in the heat only occurs for a short period. The amount of heat generated and body water lost is minimal when compared to other horse sports.

Heat stress after exercise is most likely to be seen on days when both the ambient temperature and relative humidity are high and wind speeds are low or absent (conditions of high environmental thermal load).

Horses cool themselves efficiently by evaporative cooling. As sweat and water molecules evaporate from the skin these molecules absorb and remove body heat causing the horse to cool. If the ambient temperature and humidity are both high this will slow the rate of transfer of heat from the horse's body into the environment and any cooling effect will be reduced or delayed, increasing the risk of heat stress.

Local experience identifies that heat stress is most likely to occur on days when the ambient temperature is 35°C or above or the Wet Bulb Globe Temperature is 26°C (WBGT sun). Days on which the humidity is high or there is an absence of air movement are susceptible to an increased risk of heat stress.

Application:

This Policy applies to all race meetings conducted under the control of TRSA Limited and the Rules of Racing.

Date of Effect:

This Policy, as amended, shall take effect from 1 November, 2009 and may be repealed or amended from time to time by TRSA Limited.

Symptoms of Heat Stress:

Symptoms of heat stress are:

- rapid shallow breathing (as in panting);
- very high body temperature;
- flared nostrils;
- a congestion appearance of the gum;
- staggering or weakened gait;
- abnormal, irrational behaviour such as lashing out with hooves etc; and
- (in extreme circumstances) collapse.

Circumstance contributing to Heat Stress:

The susceptibility of a horse to heat stress may not solely be influenced by temperature or the prevailing conditions. Certain other factors may adversely affect an individual horse's ability to withstand racing in hot weather.

These include:

- travelling a horse long distances prior to or on the same day as competition;
- an excitable temperament;
- younger horses less acclimatised to heat;
- heavy sweating;
- withholding drinking water on the day of racing.

Note:

Depriving a horse of water prior to racing is not a recommended practice.

During late spring or early summer horses may exhibit heat stress on days when the ambient temperature is relatively low (30°C) with relatively moderate humidity.

Requirements of the Stewards:

It shall be the responsibility of the Chairman of Stewards acting at any race meeting to;

- obtain and monitor the forecast conditions for a race meeting;
- initiate the Policy, where necessary, and ensure the provisions are appropriately observed, where applicable;
- liaise with the Race Club regarding requirements;
- during a race meeting, monitor Thermal Comfort Observation levels as provided on the Bureau of Meteorology website (www.bom.gov.au);
- throughout a race meeting, liaise with and take advice from the Veterinary Surgeons regarding the prevailing conditions and the condition of any horse;
- consider whether modifying the racing programme may provide improved conditions; and
- minimise the time that horses are required to parade and/or be held in mounting enclosures both pre- and post-race or behind the starting barriers

Note:

Modification of a race programme might include the advancement or delay in the racing programme if it appears likely the extreme conditions might ease and/or could be avoided.

In the event a trainer, concerned at the manner in which any horse is coping with the prevailing conditions, approaches the Stewards seeking to withdraw a horse from its race engagement, the Stewards shall consider all submissions on merit. Depending on the prevailing conditions, the Stewards may seek the opinion of the Veterinary Surgeon before adjudicating on any submission.

POLICY LEVEL 1:

This Policy will apply on ALL race days where the forecast temperature is 35°C (ambient) or 26°C (WBGT sun) or above.

The Club shall be instructed -

- To provide additional hoses and water containers in the mounting enclosure and the horse stalls area to maximise the trainers' ability to apply evaporative cooling techniques and opportunities for horses to drink; and
- To ensure the swabbing stall is as comfortable as possible

The Club Veterinary Surgeons will scrutinize all horses -

- presented in the mounting enclosure pre-race;
- on arrival at the barriers;
- on return to the enclosure post-race; and
- while detained in the swabbing area (either pre- or post-race)

If the Club Veterinary Surgeon is concerned about a horse's condition pre-race he shall immediately report his concern to the Stewards.

Any horse found to be exhibiting signs of heat stress will immediately be given appropriate treatment - refer Page 7. The Veterinary Surgeon may determine that intravenous medication is necessary.

POLICY LEVEL 2: (to be read with Policy Level 1)

In the event the forecast temperature for a race day is 38°C (ambient), or above, or 32°C (WBGT sun), Stewards must take advice from the Veterinary Surgeon/s in considering whether to proceed or modify the programme for that race meeting.

Should the **Stewards** determine to continue the racing programme, in addition to the measures listed in Part 1, they may instruct that -

- an additional Veterinary Surgeon be provided;
- additional equipment be provided to assist the comfort of horses;
- an adequate supply of intravenous fluids and electrolytes are available;
- a Veterinary Surgeon be available post race at a position as directed by the Stewards for riders to report concerns regarding a horse; and
- Riders, if they become concerned at the condition of their mount post-race, should proceed to the Veterinary Surgeon positioned for that purpose on the track at the entrance to the mounting enclosure.

The **Veterinary Surgeon/s** will, in addition to duties described in Policy Level 1, scrutinize all horses -

- upon arrival on course - paying particular regard to horses identified as travelling in excess of one hour to attend the meeting;
- pre-race - monitoring the horse for symptoms of increased body temperature. Any horse observed with a high body temperature (eg: in excess of 38.5°C) should continue to be monitored with particular attention to its suitability to race. If required, instruction should be provided to reduce the body temperature prior to racing;
- examine all runners upon arrival at the starting point;
- post-race - the Veterinary Surgeon shall take a position as instructed by the Stewards in order to respond to any concern expressed by a rider or to identify and assist any horse requiring first aid;
- while detained in the swabbing area (either pre- or post-race) to monitor horses sweating or becoming distressed when in the stall and/or during the sampling procedure; and
- subsequent to the race - to ensure all horses have recovered appropriately to permit travel.

Note:

No horse shall leave the course without the approval of a Veterinary Surgeon.

Attention to and/or treatment for Heat Stress:

Trainers shall ensure that post-race, horses are cooled down promptly and adequately. Trainers are alerted that unless appropriate care is provided, a horse's core temperature may continue to RISE for up to 20 minutes post-race.

Evaporative cooling, particularly sweating, is the most effective means of dissipation of body heat for the exercising horse. The liberal application of cold water in shaded, well ventilated places will greatly assist the processes which enables horses to lose excessive body heat on hot days.

Using the evaporation principle it is possible to assist horses to cool after racing in hot weather. Appropriate strategies include -

- "Wet, Scrape and Walk" - as water evaporates from the skin surface it removes body heat causing the horse to cool. The evaporation rate improves if horses are frequently hosed, excess water scraped from the coat and then walked, preferably in shaded, breezy areas.
- Horses may need to be hosed and scraped several times in between walks.
- Bucketing ice cold water over the horse may assist in the recovering of a heat affected horses but is not considered mandatory.
- Horses should be allowed to drink as much fresh, clean water as they require after racing.
- Horses must be allowed sufficient time to adequately cool down before being floated back to their stables.
- Positioning the horse in a cool location, preferably with access to breeze or air flow.

Requirements of Race Clubs:

- ensure adequate wash bays and hoses are available to enable rapid post-race cooling of horses;
- ensure adequate drinking water is available for horses;
- provide adequate ice, water, scrapers and extra hoses. Race Club staff shall provide additional hoses in the mounting enclosure and, where requested, provide large bins at the hose bays and ensure these are continually stocked with bags of ice and water to assist in the cooling of horses; and
- ensure the swabbing stall is as cool as possible. Strategies which could be considered to cool the swabbing stall include hosing the roof, allowing adequate ventilation and providing fans/air-conditioning (where practical).

Reference:

Effective Temperature using a Wet Bulb thermometer

The combined effects of temperature, humidity and air movement can be described on a single scale. This is the Effective Temperature. Effective Temperature is calculated using a Wet Bulb thermometer (one whose bulb is cooled by evaporation).

Measurement in Degrees Celsius by a Dry Bulb thermometer

The measurement in degrees Celsius that we see in weather reports is simply air temperature, measured by a Dry Bulb thermometer. It does not provide a basis for assessing the potential risks from heat exposure.

Policy amended: 01/11/2009
Policy amended: 27/03/2006
Policy Reaffirmed: 09/12/2004
Policy Reaffirmed: 13/05/2002
Replaces previous: 03/03/1997

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