

# MANAGING COLIC

by Dr. Laura Harris

Colic is a term that is used to describe abdominal pain or distress from any source. Colic signs can be caused by intestinal irritation and cramping, from constipation or impaction of bowel contents, from gas distention or bloat, from sand in the intestinal tract, from uterine torsion or premature labor, from spasms in the urinary tract, from displacement or twist of the intestines, from peritonitis, etc., etc., etc. The most important thing an owner / caretaker can do is to recognize that a problem exists, manage the problem initially and call for help if needed. The following chart is designed to help you with these tasks.

## SIGNS OF COLIC:

- 1) Lying down at unusual times of day or for long periods of time
- 2) Prolonged or repeated or violent rolling or pawing at the ground
- 3) Refusing to eat or finish feed
- 4) No bowel movements (manure) or too frequent bowel movements or diarrhea
- 5) Inappropriate sweating especially if accompanied by any of the above signs (#1-4 above)

## WHAT TO DO:

- 1) Check temperature ( should be below 101F and above 99F ) with rectal thermometer
- 2) Walk horse if necessary to prevent rolling or thrashing
- 3) When weather is warm, hose the horse off to prevent overheating, especially if you are walking the horse (#2 above)
- 4) If the signs continue more than ½ to one hour or if the horse is very painful call the veterinarian immediately and discuss the situation
- 5) If you are not the owner of the horse start trying to find the owner
- 6) Take all food away

## SAME DAY FOLLOWUP:

- 1) Call the veterinarian if the signs persist, reoccur or worsen
- 2) Check the horse at a minimum of every 2 hours for 12 hours -- or on a schedule recommended by the treating veterinarian
- 3) The horse may lie down as long as it does not roll – should not be allowed to lie flat on its side for long periods of time – should be willing and able to stand unassisted -- call for help if it won't / can't get up
- 4) Walk the horse if it begins to roll again – call for help if this happens
- 5) No solid food until the horse is alert, responsive, acting normal and has passed mineral oil if that was given -- ask the veterinarian what and when to feed if treatment was administered or supervised by the veterinarian
- 6) Unless otherwise instructed, horse should have water available