

What's in the cost of my horse's care

Colic Surgery

Case example: A 15 year old QH gelding presented to our service for a rapid onset of colic. He had been pawing the ground, curling his upper lip, yawning, stretching out to pee but nothing happening and wanting to lay down and roll. The regular veterinarian had been out to see the horse and had quickly determined that the horse had a large amount of gas in his colon on rectal exam and was very painful with a high heart rate and some fluid came back through the tube down his nose. The veterinarian discussed the options of medical management with pain medication or referral to a specialist for surgical assessment which the owner elected.

On arrival at our hospital, the horse had a colic work up which included a full physical exam, rectal exam, ultrasound exam of his abdomen and blood work.

Pre-op/Basic colic Costs:

Colic Exam with Ultrasound - \$230

Blood work to evaluate the white and red blood cells, blood gases and inflammatory markers - \$250

Administered medications such as Banamine or Rompun : \$50

Afterhours emergency fee - \$120

TOTAL: \$650 (approximately)

Surgery Costs:

Based on the exam findings, surgery was recommended. Surgery to repair a colic will involve the following costs:

General Anesthesia (medications, monitoring, equipment use, labour for up to 2 hours): \$500

Afterhours Anesthesia Call In: \$200

Catheter placement: \$35

Exploratory of the abdomen: \$2000 (simple, uncomplicated) or up to \$5000 (complicated, resections)

TOTAL: \$2735 – 5735

Post-operative Care Costs:

Surgery is only the first part of the colic management. Once the horse recovers from the procedure then the aftercare begins to maintain hydration and electrolyte which are very important factors in recovery. Also the horse will need anti-inflammatories and antibiotics given IV for several days. Gastroprotectants such as sucralfate and gastrogard are often indicated as well. All the medication and care requires intensive care monitoring by specialized equine technicians and veterinarians.

ICU monitoring (24 hour with checked every 1-2 hours) : \$400/day (less intensive can be as low as \$250-150/day) for 5 days

Antibiotics: \$120/day for 5 days

Anti -inflammatories: \$30/day for 5 days

Gastroprotectants (ideally but optional): \$70/day for 5 days

IV fluids: \$100 (set up initially) + \$200/day (approximately 20L fluid per day) for 5 days

TOTAL: \$3550 (approximately) – uncomplicated

At the conclusion for 5 days post-operative care, with no complications, the horse can be discharged and sent home. He will be monitored for any signs of suture line infections (although uncommon at this point) and will be continued on Gastrogard depending on budget constraints for another 14-20 days. He will be placed on strict stall rest for 30 days followed by 60 days of rest in a small paddock after that and then released to resume exercise at 90 days.

Total Costs for colic work up, surgery and post-op care on average can be between \$6000-7000. The costs can be lower or higher depending on the level of post-op care needed and any complications that arise.

When we quote surgical and post op costs of surgery, we typically recommend that the referring veterinarian quote:

Large intestinal issues: \$5000-8000

Small intestinal issues: \$7000-12000

We encourage anyone that owns a horse to consider the following:

1. How will I get my horse to a referral hospital in an emergency? Trailer available?
2. Can I begin a savings fund for my horse's veterinary care?
 - a. Contributing even \$100/month to a veterinary fund will build up over time to help offset veterinary and health care needs. If you don't end up needing the funds at all then it is a nice savings to have for other horse care needs in the future
3. Can I afford equine health insurance?
 - a. Equine *major medical and surgical* insurance will cover colic costs. Coverage amounts depend on policy limits so discuss with your insurer
4. Do you have an emergency contact plan if you are away or unable to express your wishes for your horse in an emergency
 - a. Designate/communicate with a friend or family member what you would want done in the event of a colic or emergency and any budget constraints you have. Signing a release with your emergency contact is important as well to allow them to make decisions when minutes count.