

Long-Distance Shipping

By Mark R. Baus, DVM, and Steve Soule, DVM

For many obvious reasons, shipping long distances is stressful for horses. For your horse, the stress of shipping comes from many sources:

- Standing on a moving platform for hours on end.
- Inability to lower his head to ground level.
- Poor ventilation with noxious fumes.
- Breathing air contaminated with fecal-origin bacteria and urine odor.
- Standing among horses with whom he is not compatible.

Here's how to help your horse deal with these challenges:

Before Shipping

All appropriate inoculations should be administered at least 10 days prior to shipment. Horses often are receiving joint injections and other therapies that involve the administration of corticosteroids. These corticosteroids should be administered at least seven days, and preferably 14 days, before

shipping. Also, corticosteroids for orthopedic therapy should be avoided for seven days after shipping long distances. A Coggins test should be completed at least two weeks before shipping. This will allow for a timely completion of the necessary health certificates. Your veterinarian can advise you on any further regulatory requirements for your state and destination.

It is essential that your horse has been without fever or other serious illness for at least one week prior to shipping. Your veterinarian might wish to perform blood work to insure that your horse's health has returned to normal if he has been ill recently.

Avoiding abdominal disruption (colic) is a principle concern. Administering a laxative prior to shipping can be accomplished in several ways. A bran mash with up to one pint of mineral oil can be fed for two to four meals prior to departing. To insure good hydration for the long trip, elec-

trolytes can be administered in the feed two to three days before shipping. Some horses, based on your prior experience with them, may require additional hydration in the form of intravenous or nasogastric electrolyte-balanced fluids. Although commonly administered in past years, antibacterial and anti-inflammatory medications are usually not recommended prior to departure to prevent illnesses. Take your horse's temperature prior to departure.

During the Trip

Traveling on large vans is typically less stressful for your horse. Unnecessary movement is minimized and ventilation is optimal. Feed amounts of hay similar to your horse's usual daily amount. Monitoring your horse's manure production during the trip is essential. Also, take note of his water intake and urine production.

Most people will ship straight through for trips up to 24 hours. If it is reasonable, a break at the halfway point can offer several advantages. It would allow for a rest from standing on the moving vehicle and allow you to check your horse's temperature. Hand grazing or monitored turn-out allows your horse to lower his head and drain phlegm from his trachea.

If your horse is developing a fever or showing signs of poor appetite or depression during the trip, consult your regular

veterinarian for advice. Alert a veterinarian at the destination to prepare for a possible examination of your horse.

Upon Arrival

Take your horse's temperature. It is not uncommon for horses to have a significant fever after a long trip. If a veterinarian is within easy reach, it is reasonable to wait an hour or two to recheck the fever. If the temperature has returned to a normal range and your horse is acting well, no further action is necessary other than monitoring the temperature for the next couple of days. If your horse's temperature is significantly elevated upon arrival, and he is depressed and not eating, immediately contact a veterinarian. Similarly, if the initial fever does not subside within several hours, an examination is in order.

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