EQUINE HEALTH · SUMMER

Sand colic: a summer risk for Wheatbelt horses

Horses grazing close to the ground over summer can swallow a lot of sand. A simple at-home test helps pick up the problem early, before it becomes an emergency.

By **Amanda Walker**, FarmCo Moora

Horses may take in sand when grazing close to the ground over summer. Over time it settles and builds up in the large colon, causing weight loss, loose manure and colic. **Severe cases may need surgery and can be fatal.** The good news is that **an at-home test can detect sand early**, giving owners time to act.

Why the Wheatbelt is at risk

Local conditions make sand colic a real summer concern. Sandy and sandplain soils are common across the district, and **dry summer pasture is often grazed down to the roots and soil**. Hay fed on bare, sandy ground adds to the problem, as do shallow dams and low troughs. The risk carries on after the autumn break, when the first green pick is easily pulled up, roots, soil and all.

Know the warning signs

Watch for **weight loss despite good feeding**, loose manure or diarrhoea, dullness or lethargy, and a reduced appetite. Mild colic signs that keep coming back are another red flag: pawing, flank watching, or lying down more than usual.

When to test

Test monthly from late spring until after the autumn break. Test straight away whenever a horse loses condition, has loose manure or shows mild colic signs.

The sand sediment test

1 Collect
Take 6 fresh manure balls from the top of the pile, not touching the ground.

2 Mix
Place in a rectal sleeve, add water and squeeze to break the manure up.

3 Hang
Hang the sleeve fingers down and leave for about 30 minutes.

4 Check
Look for sand settled in the fingertips and compare with the guide below.

Reading the result

Sand in the sample	What to do
None or a trace	Retest monthly over summer
Up to a teaspoon	Review feeding and retest in 1–2 weeks
More than a teaspoon	Contact a vet before starting any treatment

A clear test does not rule out sand. **A vet can confirm with ultrasound or x-ray.**

Prevention

Prevention starts with feeding. **Feed hay and hard feed off the ground**, using feeders, tubs or rubber mats, and provide plenty of hay so horses are not picking close to the soil. Rest bare paddocks or move horses to a firm-based yard. Keep troughs raised and clean, and offer free-choice salt or minerals. For horses at higher risk, consider a vet-advised sand-clearing program.



EMERGENCY Rolling, sweating, rapid breathing or no manure passed means calling a vet immediately.

Free sand test kits at FarmCo Moora
Collect a free rectal sleeve, instructions and summer feeding advice in store.

69 Roberts Street, Moora
08 9651 1312

This information is general in nature. Veterinary advice should be sought for a sick horse.