

Dawson Creek Veterinary Clinic (2002) Ltd



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Stabling Dos and Don'ts for your Horse

As the deep freeze continues, many of us that enjoy riding and working with horses, are considering or have already moved our horses indoors. There are many considerations to making sure your horse is comfortable and safe while in a stall. There are also considerations when designing or building stalls to keep a horse in. Fortunately in Dawson Creek, we have the advantage of having a wonderful new facility where we can board our horses but there are still things to keep in mind when moving your horse in.

If the stall is already built, then check the stall for any areas that may cause injury such as loose boards, splinters, nails or screws sticking out before putting your horse in the stall. The other important safety feature of the stall is to make sure that there is a horse proof latch on the door so your horse can't let him/herself out of the stall possibly resulting in injury or getting into feed. Feed should be kept in a secure separate area so there is no risk of a horse that does get out getting into it. Also if you are moving your horse into a facility where other horses are kept and horses are coming and going, we recommend making sure your horse's vaccines are up to date, especially influenza, equine herpes virus(rhino), sleeping sickness (encephalomyelitis) and tetanus before bringing your horse to the facility. In young and valuable horses we also recommend strangles (distemper or Strep. Equi) vaccination. Make sure there is plenty of clean, dry bedding. A horse that is used to being outside in a larger area and then is moved into a stall and stands in the smaller area can have some swelling or stocking up occur in their legs (usually in the fetlock or ankle region) and having plenty of bedding will help prevent this. If stocking up is severe, stable bandages can be used providing they are put on properly and safely. Also daily turnout or exercise is important unless your horse is injured. The other important factor to keeping a stall clean is that urine is high in ammonia and if urine levels build up, the ammonia can cause damage to your horse's lungs. Make sure your horse has access to fresh clean water at all times. If there is an automatic waterer in the stall, make sure you observe your horse using it as it can be difficult to monitor if your horse is actually drinking. If you are using buckets, make sure the buckets are safely secured. Hay can be fed in a feeder, on the ground or in a hay net or bag. I usually recommend feeding hay on the ground as this is a horse's normal position to eat and there is less hay leaves and dust going into the horse's eyes as he is

eating. I also recommend keeping hay in front of the horse as much as possible (if the horse is on a diet this may not be all the time). This helps with boredom and also decreases the risk of the horse developing ulcers. If a bag or net is used, make sure the bag is securely fastened high so there is no chance of the horse catching a leg in it. Obviously the amount you are feeding your horse should be adjusted according to the work and exercise the horse is getting.

If you are considering building a barn or setting up stalls in an existing barn there are some basic rules of thumb to follow. The minimum stall size is 10x10 feet and should only be used in small horses and ponies. Most horses require a 12x12 stall and for very large breeds (draught horses or warmbloods) 14x 14 feet may be necessary. A mare stall – for foaling and used to house mares with foals ideally should be 16 x 16 feet. The basic rule of thumb for ceiling height is a minimum of 10 feet which is important for air flow and also safety of the horse if it rears or throws its head. Doors should be at least 4 feet wide. If there are windows they should not open into the stall and ideally a grill or grate should be placed over them so the horse cannot break them. Good lighting is important and lights in the middle of the stall are the best to minimize shadows but they need to be covered with a grill or grate so the horse cannot break them if they rear or throw their head. Any wiring should be protected so the horse can't chew on the wiring and cause electrocution or fire. It is nice to allow your horse a chance to put his head out of the stall (either with a window on the stall door or divided stall doors) as horses are social creatures and like to be able to see each other and what is going on outside their stall. As there are many types of building materials and floor materials I will not go into detail on this.

For more information on stall design, bandaging, vaccinating, or feeding please contact one of our veterinarians at the Dawson Creek Veterinary Clinic. A veterinarian is making pre-scheduled equine health visits to the Dawson Creek Agriplex and if your horse requires any veterinary attention, please contact the Dawson Creek Veterinary Clinic (250)782-1080 for more information or to book an appointment. Happy Riding!