

General Anaesthetic

Knowing your horse needs a general anaesthetic for an emergency or elective surgery can be a real worry.

General anaesthetic is not used without good reason. If sedation or local anaesthetic can be used instead, your vet will always go down that route. But if general anaesthetic is the only option, what can you expect?

Before Surgery

Your vet will explain the procedure that your horse needs. The pros, cons and risks will be explained to you so you have as much information as possible to put your mind at rest. If there is anything you don't understand, please do ask.

To help reduce the risk of complications during surgery, your horse will be starved from the evening before – much like in humans before an operation. A clinical examination on the day will also be done to make sure your horse is well enough to undergo the procedure and the anaesthetic.

To make administering the anaesthetic, fluids and any other drugs as easy as possible during the surgery, an intravenous catheter will be placed into one of your horse's veins.

Your horse's shoes will be removed to make sure it doesn't hurt itself in recovery. Tail and feet bandages will be put on for cleanliness.



Risks of Anaesthetic

As there is with humans, there are risks if your horse needs general anaesthetic. Risk statistics from CEPEF say death because of general anaesthetic is less than 1%. Your vet will discuss any risks and answer any questions before the surgery so you are fully informed.

Where Will The Surgery Take Place?

It's always best for surgery that requires general anaesthetic to take place in a surgical facility. There will be a clean room (theatre), padded operating tables and monitoring equipment to keep a close eye on your horse during the procedure. All of this helps reduce the risk of complications and infections.

For some very minor procedures, the surgery is performed in outdoor or indoor arenas or fields. These areas are not ideal as they are not 'clean' areas. However, circumstances and procedures sometimes mean this is the best option at the time.

The pros, cons and risks will be explained to you so you have as much information as possible to put your mind at rest.

During Surgery

The anaesthetic will be given to your horse so it falls asleep. Once asleep, your horse will be moved from the anaesthetic induction box to the theatre where anaesthetic gasses will help keep your horse asleep and comfortable.

Your horse will be monitored using machines that continually record blood pressure, heart rate and oxygen and carbon dioxide levels. Your horse will be as safe as possible, with everything being monitored by a member of the team during surgery.



In Recovery

Your horse will be taken to a recovery room after the surgery to come round from the anaesthetic properly. This is normally a specially designed, padded room so your horse is safe while waking up.

Once your horse is steady on its feet, it will be taken back to the stable and given food and water around an hour later. You will be contacted as soon as your horse is up and about.

If your horse is staying at the vets after surgery, the team will contact you each morning with a progress report and to let you know how things are going.

General anaesthetic is never used without good reason if there are other options available. If you have any questions about general anaesthetic and what to expect, give us a call.