



info@tryonequine.com  
www.tryonequine.com

P.O. Box 547 / 155B Shuford Road  
Columbus, NC 28722

Office (828) 894-6065  
Fax (828) 894-6302

## My horse has a nasal discharge, should I be concerned?

Nasal discharge in a horse may happen for many different reasons. Some episodes of nasal discharge are completely innocuous while in other cases, nasal discharge may be a sign of a more severe condition.

Nasal discharge may happen on its own or may be accompanied by signs of disease. Nasal discharge is a symptom rather than a primary problem. Nasal discharge is a sign of disease of the respiratory system and as such can involve any component of it such as the nasal passages, the sinuses, the upper airway as well as the lower respiratory tract. In some cases it may be related to [esophageal obstruction aka choke](#). Systemic signs of disease can involve anorexia, lethargy, respiratory symptoms such as coughing, snorting, enlargement of lymph nodes, and/or fever among others. It is important to watch for any other signs of disease.

We usually characterize nasal discharge based on its appearance. Is the discharge unilateral (one sided) or bilateral (both nostrils)? What color is the discharge? Does the discharge smell? Is there any blood in the discharge? Has the discharge happened before?

Unilateral discharge tends to come from the nasal passage and can be a sign of an issue in the nasal passage itself, in the sinuses, the guttural pouches or the ethmoid areas. Clinical presentation, percussion of the sinuses, [radiographs](#) and [video endoscopy](#) can help in diagnosing the cause of the discharge. Sinus infections are often caused by dental disease since the molars do have tooth roots in the sinuses; any horse with unilateral nasal discharge that is suspected of coming from the sinus should undergo a thorough oral examination with a dental speculum.

Bilateral nasal discharge can be the result of allergies / inflammation of the airway just as it can be a sign of lower respiratory disease such as early pneumonia. A thorough respiratory exam with auscultation of the lungs and rebreathing exam helps assess the condition of the lower respiratory tract. [Ultrasound](#) and [radiographs](#) of the chest may be obtained depending on the results of the rebreathing exam. Performing a [complete blood count \(CBC\)](#) can yield results that help differentiate between viral, bacterial or allergic disease and also give an idea of the severity inflammation. In cases where we suspect lower airway involvement, we may recommend a tracheal wash or a bronchoalveolar lavage so we can look at what's going on with the cells in the

lower respiratory tract and examine for the presence of bacteria. Plenty of horses get a clearish and/or whitish nasal discharge during allergy season too, especially in times of high pollen.

In other words, nasal discharge can be a sign of a more significant problem. Knowing what's normal for your horse is helpful. If you have concerns about your horse's nasal discharge, don't hesitate to have your horse examined!

**Answered By: Karine Nunes, DVM**