



Tasmanian Equine  
Veterinary Services

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## **Castration Surgical Risks**

Castration involves surgical removal of the horse's testicles.

Castration can be performed in the standing horse under sedation and local anaesthesia or under general anaesthesia. The decision to perform castration standing or under general anaesthesia is made in consultation with the person who is physically in charge of the horse at the time of the surgery. Owners who require that the surgery is performed either standing or under general anaesthesia should make this requirement known to both the veterinary surgeon and the person in charge of the horse.

Whilst castration is a "routine" procedure very commonly performed on colts for management reasons, there are potentially serious complications associated with castration in horses.

Accurate identification and signed consent form is mandatory before castration will be performed on any horse.

Castration may be performed by either an "open" or "closed" technique and may be performed "on farm" or in a surgical facility. Choice of technique is dependant on whether castration is performed on the standing or anaesthetized horse, facilities available, age and type of the horse and preference of the veterinary surgeon. Potential complications exist with both techniques and whether the procedure is performed on the standing or anaesthetized horse.

"Open" castration can be performed in the standing horse or under general anaesthesia. Potential complications associated with "open" castration include swelling, bleeding or haemorrhage, infection and herniation or evisceration (release of internal tissue or bowel through the wound). Minor complications such as swelling of the scrotum and sheath or local infection are common and most often require little or no treatment. However, occasionally more serious complications can occur including severe haemorrhage or more rarely herniation of intestine. These complications can be life threatening and emergency treatment may be necessary to save the horse.

"Closed" castration is performed under general anaesthesia and involves placement of a suture around the spermatic cord before emasculation (removal of the testicle). This technique reduces the risk of serious haemorrhage, herniation of the intestine and often reduces post operative swelling.

"Closed" castration requires increased surgery time and the placement of sutures which can increase the risk of infection. Closed castration is generally recommended in cases where there may be an increased risk of complications associated with the "open" technique, such as castration of an older horse or where a scrotal hernia is suspected.

Tasmanian Equine Veterinary Services offers "on farm" castration. This can either be performed in the standing horse under sedation and local anaesthesia or under general anaesthesia as described above. The temperament and handling history of the horse will often determine which option is taken. An "open" technique is preferred to reduce the increased risk of infection associated with "on farm" castration.