

# What to expect

## SICK FOALS (ambulatory sick or critically-ill foals)



52 Campus Drive, Saskatoon SK S7N 5B4

Small Animal Clinic | Large Animal Clinic  
306-966-7126 | 306-966-7178

### About the VMC

Welcome to the WCV Veterinary Medical Centre (VMC), the veterinary referral centre for all of Western Canada and the teaching hospital for future veterinarians and veterinary specialists.

Our clinical team includes board-certified veterinary specialists, clinical associates and registered veterinary technologists, as well as veterinary specialists in training (residents), clinical interns and senior veterinary students. We look forward to caring for your animal and meeting you in person.

### Before Your Visit

To prepare for your visit to the VMC, please visit us online:

<https://vmc.usask.ca/about/new-client.php>

There, you will find more information about finding our location, parking, hours of operation, what to expect when you arrive at the Large Animal Clinic and “what to expect” fact sheets about specialized services.

### What to Expect

While the WCV Veterinary Medical Centre (VMC) shares many similarities to other veterinary hospitals, there are some differences that may have an impact on your appointment.

- The VMC is a teaching hospital for WCV veterinary students and for students enrolled in the veterinary technology program at the Saskatchewan Polytechnic. Please note that teaching takes additional time. Students participate in all aspects of examining and treating our patients under the immediate supervision of licensed veterinarians and board-certified veterinary specialists. While teaching is essential to our facility, the well-being of our patients is the highest priority for VMC clinical teams.
- Given the complexity of referral cases, we often need to order additional diagnostic testing or consult with others about diagnoses and treatment plans for patients. If you are travelling from out of town, please be prepared to stay two days in Saskatoon with your animal. In some cases, your stay may need to be longer. During your appointment, we will give you an estimate of the length of time it may take for additional tests and consultation.

### General Steps

#### *Ambulatory sick foals*

Ambulatory sick foals are patients that present with signs of disease but can walk and stand without support. They may not be able to nurse, in which case their feeding must be assisted. Different organ systems of the foal may be affected.

Ambulatory sick foals are a medical emergency. If our clinical team can treat these patients as soon as signs of illness are detected, the prognosis is more favourable and treatment costs are likely lower — depending on the cause and evolution of disease. Sick foals can quickly become critically ill patients requiring intensive care. Even a foal that just seems a little “off” should be seen by a veterinarian immediately.



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[www.usask.ca/wcvm](http://www.usask.ca/wcvm)

## Payment

If your animal is not hospitalized, the WCVM Veterinary Medical Centre requires full payment at the time of service.

If your animal is hospitalized, half of the estimated cost is due prior to services being provided. Final payment is due at the time of discharge.

Occasionally, the hospital will mail statements to you after discharge for additional tests that were approved by you and for charges not included on the initial invoice at discharge.

The WCVM Veterinary Medical Centre accepts the following payment methods:

- cash
- credit card (Visa and MasterCard)
- debit card (Interac)

Personal cheques are not accepted.

If you have questions about payment, call the administration office at 306-966-7103, or visit [vmc.usask.ca/about/payment.php](http://vmc.usask.ca/about/payment.php).

## For more information

Large Animal Clinic  
306-966-7178  
[vmccorrespond@usask.ca](mailto:vmccorrespond@usask.ca)

## General Steps, continued . . .

The typical management of an ambulatory sick foal will include:

- A house officer (clinical interns or residents who are licensed veterinarians) will take the call if signs are observed after hours and ask general information about your foal to approach the case the best way possible at arrival.
- The house officer will give you a general cost estimate that includes initial workup and one night of hospitalization. Please note that this estimate is based on the information given and further diagnostic tests or treatments may be required. The VMC charges an emergency fee for after-hours visits.
- A senior veterinary student and a house officer assisted by a registered veterinary technologist (if available) will meet you on arrival and help you unload the mare and foal. In most cases, it is best to bring the mare along unless she has refused the foal and may harm it.
- Our team will gather further history and perform a complete physical examination of both the mare and foal. Problems with the mare during pregnancy may have contributed to the current status of your foal. Our team will perform basic diagnostic tests, such as bloodwork, to assess signs of infection and immunologic status after colostrum intake. Timely collection of this information is fundamental.
- At this point, based on the physical examination and basic diagnostic tests, we will discuss further testing and a treatment plan with you before implementation. The next steps will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- Depending on what system is affected in the patient, we may need to conduct further diagnostic tests such as blood culture, fecal testing and radiographs (or other medical imaging tests). These tests may need to be repeated during hospitalization for monitoring purposes.
- Treatments will differ from case to case, based on the origin of the disease and severity of clinical signs. They may range from basic treatments such as a plasma transfusion and monitoring for a couple

### General Steps, continued . . .

of days to more intensive care. For example, our clinical team may need to use assisted nursing or feeding through nasogastric tube, enemas, plasma transfusion, fluid therapy or antibiotic treatment. We will discuss the treatment plan with you before implementing any steps.

- If we discover further health abnormalities such as pneumonia, colic or a ruptured bladder, more intensive care such as oxygen administration and even surgery may be necessary.

### Critically-ill foals

Critically-ill foals are unable to stand, present with severe signs of disease, or are in shock. These critically-ill patients require intensive care and permanent monitoring during hospitalization. These foals must get medical assistance as soon as possible since hours can mean the difference between life or death.

The typical management of a critically-ill foal will include:

- A house officer (clinical interns or residents who are licensed veterinarians) will take the call if signs are observed after hours. The house officer will ask general information about your foal to approach the case the best way possible at arrival.
- The house officer will give you a general cost estimate that includes initial workup and one night of hospitalization. Please note that this estimate is based on the information given and further diagnostic tests may be required. The VMC charges an emergency fee for after-hours visits.
- A senior veterinary student and a house officer assisted by a registered veterinary technologist (if available) will meet you on arrival and help you unload the mare and foal. In most cases, it is best to bring the mare along unless she has refused the foal and may harm it.
- As time can be a matter of life or death for these

patients, the clinician in charge of the case may have to assess your foal swiftly and work on stabilizing the patient. At the same time, another team member will gather further information about your foal and mare or run laboratory tests so we can implement stabilizing treatments as soon as possible.

- Once the foal is stable, we will discuss further diagnostic tests and treatments, the foal's prognosis, its daily care and hospitalization costs with you. Depending on the **nature of the foal's illness**, we may require diagnostic tests such as further blood work, fecal testing, and radiographs of the foal's thorax, abdomen or joints. Some of these tests may need to be repeated during hospitalization for monitoring purposes.
- The care of critically-ill foals requires a whole team of competent and dedicated personnel. In most cases, we will need to implement around-the-clock monitoring, tube feeding, plasma transfusion, oxygen administration, fluid therapy, antibiotic treatment, anti-inflammatory therapy and supportive care. At all times, at least one team member will be with your foal in the stall to do the following:
  - hold/keep the foal in the best position based on its needs
  - assist the foal to stand or turn regularly
  - keep the foal and its bed clean and dry
  - monitor proper placement and attachment of oxygen and IV (intravenous) lines, urinary catheter and feeding tube, if present
  - notify the clinician, who can be reached any time, of changes in the patient's status
  - Provide timely medications and feeding