

“My 5 year old Quarter horse has recently had two episodes of bleeding in his left nostril. It has just been a small trickle that stops after about 2 minutes, but it was enough to make me a little worried. What could be causing this and is it something I should get checked out if it happens again?”

Blood from the nostrils (epistaxis) can be a result of several different conditions and is generally divided into two categories. One category consists of unilateral epistaxis and the other consists of epistaxis from both nostrils.

Unilateral epistaxis typically originates from the structures in and around the nasal cavity. Conditions which could cause unilateral epistaxis include sinus problems (such as a sinus cyst), ethmoid hematoma, guttural pouch conditions, nasal polyps or any other condition affecting the nasal passages.

Bilateral epistaxis is usually a result of bleeding somewhere in the lower airway or problems elsewhere in the body. Causes of bilateral epistaxis include exercise-induced pulmonary hemorrhage (EIPH in racehorses), pneumonia or other lung diseases, clotting disorders, or other systemic diseases. Guttural pouch mycosis could result in unilateral or bilateral epistaxis.

Some conditions can be life-threatening so it would be advisable to have a veterinarian exam your horse if another episode occurs. An upper airway endoscopic examination can be performed to assess the nasal passages, guttural pouches and upper airway. Radiographs may also be helpful in diagnosing the cause of the epistaxis if it is originating from the sinuses. Treatment is available for many of these conditions causing epistaxis.

