



## Gelding: In the Field or in the Hospital?

Most horse owners castrate their male horses to make the animals easier to manage and to prevent unwanted breeding. And while castration is a common surgery, it still carries the risk of potentially fatal complications.

Castration approaches can be grouped into two broad categories: those performed “in the field” on horses that are standing and sedated or under a brief field

anesthesia, and those performed under general anesthesia (GA) in a sterile operating environment (see page 31 to learn more about the surgery).

Veterinarians generally leave the castration incisions open to heal when performing the procedure under field conditions, and they suture the incisions after castration in a hospital. Standing field castrations are generally cheaper to perform and avoid risks associated with GA.

One study<sup>1</sup> showed that 20% of standing castrations performed in the field and left to heal by second intention became infected. Conversely, only 2% of those in which surgery was performed under general anesthesia and the incision was sutured suffered this complication.

Wound infections often require prolonged antibiotic therapy and



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physical interventions to re-establish drainage, which can be costly and delay the horse's return to function. However, it's important to weigh the benefits of gelding in the hospital against GA recovery risk, which was associated with one death (1% of all cases) in the study.

### REFERENCE

1 Mason BJ, Newton JR, Payne RJ, and Pilsworth RC. Costs and complications of equine castration: a U.K. practice-based study comparing 'standing nonsutured' and 'recumbent sutured' techniques. *Equine Vet J.* 2005 Sep;37(5):468-72.

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