

# **Be Prepared for an Emergency.**

## **When To Call A Vet**

Call a vet if your horse:

- is injured and bleeding profusely
- is sweating for no known reason
- is foaming at the mouth for no known reason
- has signs of colic
- has any eye injury or excessive tearing in an eye
- is dejected, listless, or lacking normal energy levels
- has a skin condition that doesn't respond to treatment
- has persistent diarrhea
- is reluctant or unable to move
- is holding up a leg or won't put a hoof firmly on the ground.
- is not eating (A horse is never not hungry!)

If you own horses long enough, sooner or later you are likely to confront a medical emergency. There are several behavioral traits that make horses especially accident-prone: their instinctive flight-or-fight response, their need to establish the pecking order within a herd, and their natural curiosity. Such behaviors account for many of the cuts, bruises, and abrasions that horses suffer. In fact, lacerations are probably the most common emergency that horse owners must contend with. There are other types of emergencies as well, such as colic, foaling difficulties, acute lameness, seizures, and illness. As a horse owner, you must know how to recognize serious problems and respond promptly, taking appropriate action while awaiting the arrival of your veterinarian.

Many accidents can be prevented by taking the time to evaluate your horse environment and removing potential hazards.

## **RECOGNIZING SIGNS OF DISTRESS**

When a horse is cut or bleeding, it's obvious that there is a problem. But in cases of colic, illness, or a more subtle injury, it may not be as apparent. That's why it's important to know your horse's normal vital signs, including temperature, pulse and respiration (TPR), as well as its normal behavior patterns. You must be a good observer so that you readily recognize signs of ill health.

## **WHAT'S NORMAL?**

There will be variations in individual temperature, pulse and respiration values. Take several baseline measurements when the horse is healthy, rested, and relaxed. Write them down and keep them within easy reach, perhaps with your first aid kit, so you have them to compare to in case of an emergency.

Normal ranges for adult horses are:

Pulse rate: 30-42 beats per minute.

Respiratory rate: 12-20 breaths per minute.

Rectal temperature: 99.5' to 101.5' F. If the horse's temperature exceeds 102.5' F., contact your veterinarian immediately. Temperatures of over 103' F indicate a serious disorder.

Capillary refill time (time it takes for color to return to gum tissue adjacent to teeth after pressing and releasing with your thumb): 2 seconds.

### **Other observations you should note:**

Skin pliability is tested by pinching or folding a flap of neck skin and releasing. It should immediately snap back into place. Failure to do so is evidence of dehydration.

Color of the mucous membranes of gums, nostrils, conjunctiva (inner eye tissue), and inner lips of vulva should be pink. Bright red, pale pink to white, or bluish-purple coloring may indicate problems.

Color, consistency, and volume of feces and urine should be typical of that individual's usual excretions. Straining or failure to excrete should be noted.

Signs of distress, anxiety or discomfort.

Lethargy, depression or a horse that's "off-feed."

Presence or absence of gut sounds.

Evidence of lameness such as head-bobbing, reluctance to move, odd stance, pain, unwillingness to rise.

Bleeding, swelling, evidence of pain.

Seizures, paralysis, or "tying up" (form of muscle cramps that ranges in severity from mild stiffness to life-threatening illness).

Preparation is vital when confronted with a medical emergency. No matter the situation you may face, mentally rehearse the steps you will take to avoid letting panic take control.

You don't want to waste time, you need to be organized and calm in your horse's time of need.

Mentally rehearse your emergency action plan. In an emergency, time is critical.

Don't be concerned with overreacting or annoying your veterinarian.

By acting quickly and promptly, you can minimize the consequences of an injury or illness.

1) Keep your veterinarians number by each phone, including how the practitioner can be reached after hours.

2) Know in advance the most direct route to an equine surgery center in case you need to transport the horse.

3) Post the names and phone numbers of nearby friends and neighbors who can assist you in an emergency while you wait for the veterinarian.

4) Prepare a first aid kit and store it in a clean, dry, readily accessible place. Make sure that family members and other barn users know where the kit is. (Also keep a first aid kit in your horse trailer or towing vehicle, and a pared-down version to carry on the trail.)

**The following suggestions should be viewed as guidelines in an emergency:**

1. Catch and calm your horse to prevent further injury. Move the horse to a stall or other familiar surroundings

if this is possible without -causing distress or further injury to the horse.

Providing hay or grain can also be a good distraction if the horse is not showing signs of colic.

2. Get help before attempting to -treat or evaluate a wound. It can be difficult and very dangerous to try and inspect or clean a wound without someone to hold the horse.

You cannot help your horse if you are seriously injured yourself

3. Evaluate the location, depth, and severity of the wound. Call your veterinarian for a recommendation anytime you feel your horse-is in need of emergency care.

Here are some examples of situations where your Vet should be called:

A. There appears to be excessive bleeding

B. The entire skin thickness has been penetrated.

C. The wound occurs near or over a joint.

D. Any structures underlying the skin are visible.

E. A severe wound has occurred in the lower leg or below knee or hock level.

G. The wound is severely contaminated

4. Notify your veterinarian immediately- Be prepared to-provide specific information about the horse's condition,

as mentioned above, and other data that will help your practitioner assess the immediacy of the danger and instruct you in how to proceed. There is a picture of the horse at the bottom of this page to help you describe the area that is injured.

Consult with your veterinarian regarding a recommendation before you attempt to clean the wound or remove debris or penetrating objects, as you may precipitate uncontrollable bleeding or do further damage to the wound. Large objects should be stabilized to avoid damaging movement if possible. Don't put anything on the wound except a compress or cold water.

5. Listen closely and follow your equine practitioner's instructions.

Do not administer drugs, especially tranquilizers or sedatives, unless specifically instructed to do so by the veterinarian. If the horse has suffered severe blood loss or is in shock , the administration of certain drugs can be life-threatening.

6. Stop the bleeding (This may be the FIRST step, if the bleeding is profuse!) by covering the wound with a sterile,

absorbent pad (not cotton), and applying firm, steady, even pressure to the wound.

7. If the eye is injured, do not attempt to treat- Await your veterinarian.

8. If a horse steps on a nail or other sharp object, and it remains embedded in the hoof, first clean the hoof.

Consult with your veterinarian regarding a recommendation before you remove the nail.

If your veterinarian advises, carefully remove the nail to prevent the horse from stepping on it and driving it deeper into the hoof cavity.

As you remove it, be sure to mark the exact point and depth of entry with tape and/or a marker so the veterinarian can access the extent of the damage. Apply antiseptic to the wound, and wrap to prevent additional contamination.

9. All horses being treated for lacerations or puncture wounds will require a tetanus booster.

### **Here is a short list of essential items for your first aid kit:**

#### Iodine Solution Diluted

An Iodine Solution that is properly diluted is Betadine. Any fresh wounds should be flushed out with this solution.

#### Hydrogen Peroxide

Only use Hydrogen Peroxide to flush deep wounds or punctures.

#### Neosporin and Nolvasan

These are topical antiseptic ointments that fight bacteria and promote healing. These should be used twice daily after a veterinarian has seen the wound.

#### Sterile Gauze Sponges

Use these when cleaning the wounded area with an Diluted Iodine Solution.

#### Sterile Gauze Roll and Self-Adhesive Tape

The Self-Adhesive Tape holds the Gauze to the wound. The tape is easily applied and removed. A few good brands are: Kling, Elastikon, Flexus and Vet-Rap.

#### Blunt-tipped Bandage Scissors

These come in handy for removing bandages.

#### Topical Eye Ointment

Nonsteroidal Eye Ointment comes in handy when a horse injures his eye, and a veterinarian is not immediately available.

#### Rectal Thermometer with string and clip attached

An adult horse's normal temperature is between 99.0 and 101 degrees F.

#### Injectable Sedative and Pain Killer

Keep a small dose of each available. They come in handy in situations such as colic or for horses who are unwilling.

### **Other Supplies That Should be Included:**

- Easy-Boot
- Stethoscope
- Twitch
- Hoof Pick
- Fly Lotion
- Wire cutters
- Electrolytes
- Flashlight
- Cotton roll
- Cling wrap
- Gauze pads, in assorted sizes
- Cup or container
- Surgical scrub and antiseptic solution
- Latex gloves
- Saline solution
- Clippers