



ACF Riding Club



Do you know when to call for **veterinary** **care?**

First Aid for Horses

No horse owner wants to think about their horse becoming injured, but thinking about it now can help save your horse's life in the future. Accidents and injuries happen. The better prepared you are for these events, the better chance your horse has of recovering. However, never think of first aid as a substitute for veterinary care. Unless the injury is very minor, such as a superficial scrape, contact your veterinarian as soon as possible and follow any instructions she gives you.

What Is First Aid?

First aid provides immediate care after an injury or illness. Usually, the goal of first aid is to prevent any further harm from occurring and to start the recovery process. There are two general types of first aid. In the case of very minor injuries, first aid treats the problem and no further medical attention is needed. The other type is a stop-gap measure providing immediate care until more skilled medical help arrives.

What to Do When Your Horse Is Injured

The first thing to do if your horse is injured is to remain calm. He needs you at this moment, and if you panic, you will not be able to help him. Additionally, your screaming or frantic motions will just upset him more. Take a deep breath and then act appropriately.

Quickly observe the situation and assess your horse and his surroundings. Try to determine how serious the injury is and if there is more than one injury. Look for broken bones, injuries to the eyes, and deep punctures. These wounds will always require vet care, while a small cut may not. Always call your vet if you are unsure of how injured your horse is.

If your horse can move around, tie him up to prevent him from moving around a lot and making the injury worse. If he is severely panicked and thrashing around, remember your own safety—you can do your horse no good if he accidentally injures you. If this is the case, try to verbally calm him while you call your veterinarian (or better yet, have a friend call).

If your horse is bleeding badly (i.e., blood is squirting out in pulses or rapidly streaming out), you must stop the bleeding. To do this, take a clean towel or bandage and place it over the wound. Hold it firmly but gently in place until the bleeding stops. If bleeding is minor and/or slow, try to stop it only if your vet instructs you to do so over the phone. Do not remove any foreign objects (thorns, nails, glass, etc.) yourself; doing so may make a wound worse.

After assessing the situation and stopping serious bleeding, take your horse's vital signs, write them down, and call your vet. Take his pulse (just behind the left elbow and on the back of the lower jaw are two good locations to do this), respiratory rate and temperature. It's also a good idea to look at his gums to see if they are their normal healthy pink color. This information will help your vet determine how badly injured your horse really is and therefore how quickly she needs to get to your horse. Your vet will likely have instructions for you to carry out until she arrives.

Know Your Horse's Vital Signs

Knowing your horse's normal temperature, pulse, and respiration is important. Your horse's vital signs are the first clue to an illness, injury, or other abnormality. Take his temperature and measure his heart and respiratory rates at different times over a few days to determine what is average. Normal ranges are:

- **Temperature** - 99°F to 101°F, though temperature may increase by up to 3 degrees depending on ambient temperature, level of exercise, and degree of dehydration. Your horse's temperature is taken rectally, using a digital thermometer.
- **Pulse/Heart Rate** - 32-48 beats per minute, though age, ambient temperature, humidity, exercise, and excitement can all affect your horse's heart rate. Check his heart rate with a stethoscope placed over his ribs, just behind the elbow. Or take his pulse on the inside of the jaw or on the ankle.
- **Respiratory Rate** - 12-16 breaths per minute, though ambient temperature, humidity, exercise, and excitement can all affect your horse's breathing rate. Watch the nostrils or flanks and count the number of times he breathes out.



In addition, always check your horse for wounds, soreness, or injuries while you groom him.

The Three Stages of Equine Emergencies

All horse wounds, injuries, and illnesses fall into three categories: critical, urgent, and minor. A critical emergency requires immediate attention by your equine veterinarian. At the other end of the spectrum, an elective emergency can often be observed until your next veterinarian visit. Of course, when in doubt contact your veterinarian. As with most things, safe is always better than sorry.

Before You Call

Regardless of the type of emergency your horse has suffered, there is some information your veterinarian will need to immediately assess the situation. Gather the following information before you call for veterinary care:

- Temperature, pulse/heart rate, and respiratory rate
- Location and severity of any injury, wound, or lameness
- Your horse's demeanor, including depression or agitation
- Location of any swelling and if there is any heat present

Stage 1: Critical Emergencies - Contact Your Veterinarian Immediately

The following are just some of the situations that are serious and potentially life-threatening. Immediately contact your equine veterinarian if your horse exhibits:

- Bone fractures or severe lameness on which your horse cannot bear his weight
- Abnormal respiration, including rapid, distressed breathing or blocked airways
- Profuse bleeding from any injury or wound, especially if the blood is bright red
- Neurological dysfunction (staggering, lack of coordination, or behavior change)
- Eye injury or trauma, especially if your horse is unwilling to open his eyelids
- Injury to any vital structure (eyes, genitals, joints, etc) or wounds requiring stitches
- Signs of severe colic, including loss of appetite and reduced fecal production
- Abnormal vital signs, including:
 - Temperature over 102°F
 - Pulse over 80 beats per minute
 - Elevated breathing while at rest

- Acute laminitis, seizures, heat stroke, severe or persistent colic, or watery diarrhea
- Any mare who takes longer than 30 minutes to deliver her foal
- Suspected or known ingestion of a poison or toxin
- Puncture wounds



Stage 2: Urgent Emergencies - Contact Your Veterinarian That Same Day or the Next Morning

The following situations need prompt attention; however, each can usually be managed with certain **first aid** measures. Contact your veterinarian to schedule an appointment as soon as possible if your horse exhibits:

- Sudden onset of lameness on which your horse can bear his weight
- Superficial trauma or injury away from the eyes, genitals, joints, etc.
- Chronic laminitis or chronic inflammatory respiratory disease flare-ups
- Slightly elevated temperature, respiration, or heart rate

Stage 3: Minor Emergencies - Schedule an Appointment with Your Veterinarian

The following situations can usually wait for a scheduled appointment. However, you should continually monitor your horse and contact your veterinarian immediately if any minor emergency worsens. Observe your horse closely and make a note to discuss with your veterinarian if your horse exhibits:

- Slight lameness
- Skin rashes, etc
- Slight eye discharge without pain or vision loss
- Slightly reduced appetite but otherwise healthy

- Slight difficulty chewing
- Slight nasal discharge without fever or heavy breathing

Treating a Minor Wound

Treating minor injuries in horses is similar to treating them in humans. Use common sense and follow this list:



1. Gently clean out the wound with a clean towel soaked in a mix of warm water and antiseptic (such as povidone-iodine).
2. Dry the wound with sterile gauze. Use a towel to dry off the surrounding area so that a bandage will stick properly.
3. Apply triple antibiotic ointment unless your vet says otherwise.
4. Cover the wound with nonstick sterile gauze and fix in place with a bandage. You will need to change the bandage and clean the wound twice a day or as per your vet's instructions.

Simple Ways to Help Prevent Equine Emergencies

In some regards, illnesses, injuries, and wounds are inevitable for most horses. However, there are certain things you can do to help prevent many illnesses and curb some injuries before they occur. The key is to keep your horse in the best health possible.

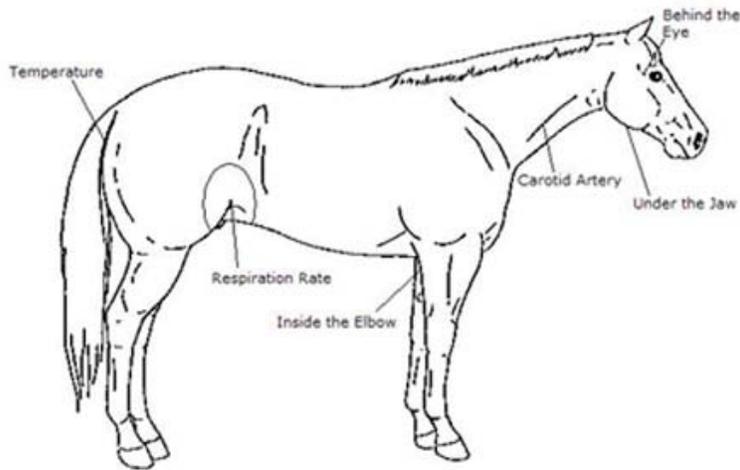
In addition, you should discuss emergency care with any individual that tends to your horse. This is especially important if you board your horse or if someone is watching over him while you are away on vacation. In fact, any person who is in contact with your horse should have your veterinarian's contact information. You should also file a written waiver with your equine veterinarian that authorizes your chosen caregiver(s) to arrange for veterinary care while you are away.

To keep your horse healthy, always:

- Schedule regular physical exams
- Immunize your horse with the correct vaccines
- Control internal parasites with appropriate de-wormers
- Control insects with appropriate repellents, fly sheets, and traps
- Schedule regular dental exams and farrier visits

Equine emergencies are always a frightening time. However, by assessing the situation with the above guidelines in mind, you can help ensure your horse is quickly on the road to recovery.

Source: Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



How to Respond to Horse Emergencies

Your horse, like you and every other animal, is susceptible to health troubles. The problems in the symptom column in the following table are ones that merit immediate attention and a call to the veterinarian.

Symptom(s)	Possible Cause	Steps to Perform
Bleeding	Injury	Apply pressure; call vet
Blood in urine	Severe infection or bladder injury	Call vet immediately
Coughing and salivating with head down as food exits the mouth	Choking	Horse can breathe, but call vet immediately
Inability to stand; staggering	Severe sickness	Call vet immediately
Liquid, foul-smelling excrement	Diarrhea	Call vet immediately
Profuse sweating, lying down and getting up,	Colic	Remove food; call vet

pawing ground, biting abdomen		immediately
Rapid breathing, raspy breathing, heavy coughing	Illness or infection	Call vet immediately
Refusal to eat	Serious illness or mild colic	Call vet immediately
Severe pain	Injury or illness	Call vet immediately
Straining to defecate or urinate	Intestinal or urethral blockage	Call vet immediately
Swelling or body part that's hot to the touch	Injury	Call vet immediately
Teary eye; closed eye; red eye; cloudy eye	Eye injury or infection	Call vet immediately
Temperature significantly above or below 98–101.5°F	Fever	Call vet immediately

Overheating and Heatstroke

Heatstroke in horses is common when they are overworked on hot summer days, but it can occur on warm days at any time of the year. Be on the lookout for these signs: unexpected fatigue, lethargy, inappetence, stumbling, panting, elevated temperature, and elevated pulse and/or respiratory rate. If you see these signs in your horse, he is probably overheated.

The first thing to do when you suspect that your horse has heatstroke is to cool him off. Move him to a shady area. Offer him drinking water, but do not let him drink too much—give a gallon (3 to 4 liters) or so every few minutes rather than a whole trough at once. Pour cold water over his back, and have a fan blowing on him if you can. While you are doing these things, make sure that he can get to his salt lick. If he is overheated, he has probably lost a lot of salt and other electrolytes in his sweat—the salt lick will help restore them.

If there is no improvement in your horse's symptoms within 30 minutes, call your veterinarian for help. Call your vet immediately if his temperature goes over 105°F (40.5°C) or he stops sweating.



The First-Aid Kit

Every horse owner should put together a first-aid kit and place it in the stable. Keep the kit in the same place at all times so that you always know where it is. It should be clearly labeled, so if someone else has to find it—for example, if you need to stay with your horse to keep him calm after a fall—that person will be able to do so quickly. Plastic or metal toolboxes work nicely as first-aid kits. You can also purchase a first-aid kit specifically for horses.

It is also wise to keep a number of clean towels and a clean bucket near the first-aid kit. These items will come in handy for cleaning wounds. The towels and bucket should only be used for this purpose; never use them for other purposes, or you risk exposing your horse to infection.

Get in the habit of inspecting your first-aid kit regularly. Take stock of all the items to make sure

that you have everything you need. Check the expiration dates of all medications, and replace any that are out of date.

VET CARE 

EQUINE EMERGENCY FIRST AID KIT

1. 911 numbers: Veterinarian - Police - Paramedics - Family - Friends
2. Thermometer
3. Bandage Scissors
4. Gauze Squares - One Sleeve
5. Roll Gauze - 4 to 6 rolls of 4 or 6 inch width
6. Cotton Roll - 2 to 4 rolls
7. Leg Bandages
8. Duct Tape
9. Adhesive Tape
10. Antibiotic Ointment
11. Antibacterial Spray Powder
12. Alu Spray Bandage
13. Ophthalmic Ointment
14. Butazolidin Paste
15. Banamine Paste
16. Electrolyte Paste
17. Saline
18. Iodine
19. Vetwrap
20. Hoof Pick
21. Gloves
22. Flashlight
23. Pen or Marker
24. Towels
25. Tweezers
26. Pliers
27. Stethoscope
28. Mosquito Forceps
29. Twitch
30. Betadine
31. Hydrogen Peroxide
32. Bucket
33. Water
34. A 24 Inch Section of PVC Pipe - Split in Half Lengthwise for Splinting
35. Syringes & Needles (only if you know how to use them!)



TEMPERATURE ~ A horse's normal body temperature is 99 - 101 F.

PULSE ~ The normal pulse rate, most often taken by listening to the heart on the left side of the chest just behind the left elbow, is 36 to 42 beats per minute. Young horses & ponies tend to be faster.

RESPIRATION ~ The normal rate for horses is between 8 - 12 breaths per minute.

CAPILLARY REFILL TIME ~ Time it takes for color to return to gum tissue adjacent to teeth after pressing & releasing with your thumb - 2 seconds.