



*Quality and Concern in Equine Practice*  
 Serving Colorado Springs and Southern Colorado

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**Colorado Equine Veterinary Services,**  
*A full-service, equine wellness, critical care and ambulatory practice.*

- ◆ General Medical
- ◆ Preventive Medicine
- ◆ Diagnostic Exams
- ◆ Reproductive
- ◆ Minor Surgery
- ◆ Lameness Exams
- ◆ Complementary Medicine

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## Recognizing Possible Problems

The horse's natural behavior, the flight-or-fight response, the herd instinct, and its unquenchable natural curiosity, make the horse accident prone.

The most common emergencies are cuts, lacerations, bruises and abrasions.

Owning a horse, you may also face colic, foaling difficulties, acute lameness, seizures, and illness.

As a horse owner, it is helpful to know how to recognize signs of possible problems, how to

**If your horse shows signs of violent pain, call your Veterinarian!**

safely stabilize your horse, and when to call your veterinarian. The key is to be

prepared. Horses exhibiting violent pain often have a serious problem.

If your horse shows signs of violent pain call your veterinarian!

In a developing emergency, symptoms may be subtle and easy to miss, so observe your horse carefully.

Consult with your veterinarian if in doubt.

## Signs of Possible Problems

- Not drinking water
- A horse that's "off feed"
- Looking at the flank
- Any sign of distress, anxiety, or discomfort
- Lying down and getting up carefully
- Appears lifeless, drooping head, depressed
- Weight loss
- Unable to gain weight regardless of change in diet
- Decreased appetite
- Watery diarrhea
- Absence of gut sounds
- "Tying up" - a form of muscle cramps that range in severity from mild stiffness to life-threatening

*A check of your horse's vital signs will help confirm your suspicions.*

### Signs of oncoming Lameness

- Head-bobbing
- Reluctance to move
- Odd stance
- Pain
- Unwillingness to rise or move

**Temperature, Pulse, Respiration are Key Indicators**  
*See page 2*

**Vital Signs** - Key indicators of your horse's health. Ask your veterinarian to help you learn to assess them.

	<b>Normal</b>	<b>How to Assess</b>	<b>When to Be Concerned</b>
<b>Heart rate (beats per min.)</b>	30-42 beats per minute	Take pulse where the facial artery passes under the lower jaw. Using two fingers, locate the artery, count number of pulses for 15 seconds, multiply by 4 to obtain pulse rate.	<b>Pulse rate sustained over 60 bpm</b> when horse is cooled down and calm.
<b>Respiratory rate (breaths per min.)</b>	20 to 30 breaths per minute.	When listening to the lungs, most noises should be heard over a 3 to 4 inch section of chest wall. Place a stethoscope 5 inches behind and 7 inches above the elbow. You should hear gentle blowing sounds, similar to someone blowing on a hot drink. Listen for unimpeded airflow.	<b>Signs of congestion:</b> Loud sounds heard over a large chest area. Bubbling sounds, similar to someone blowing through a straw into a liquid • A high-pitched squeak • Silence
<b>Temperature (degrees Fahrenheit)</b>	99.5 to 101.5 degrees F.	Lubricate an equine thermometer, partially insert into horse's rectum, tilted slightly. Hold for a full minute, wipe clean and read.	<b>Temperatures over 103' F</b> indicate a serious disorder, contact your veterinarian immediately.
<b>Mucous membranes (gums, nostrils)</b>	Pale pink		<b>Bright red, white, or bluish-purple</b>
<b>Capillary refill time</b>	1 to 2 seconds	Briefly press a thumb against your horse's gums. Gums should turn white, then pink, in no more than 2 seconds.	<b>over 5 seconds</b>
<b>Hydration</b>	After "pinch test", the skin flattens immediately.	Pinch Test - pinch your horse's neck pulling up, skin should flatten immediately.	<b>If the skin stays "tenting",</b> the horse may be dehydrated.
<b>Gut sounds</b>	You should hear a lot of gurgle noises.	Listen in the area behind ribcage.	<b>Be concerned if you <u>do not</u> hear anything.</b>
<b>Feces</b>	Small, firm fecal balls.	Watch for sand or parasite larva.	about sand colic
<b>Pain level in stomach</b>	None	Any sign of abdominal pain	about sand colic