

Vital Signs

Ask your veterinarian to help you learn to assess your Horse's Vital Signs.

	Normal	How to Assess	Be Concerned When
Heart rate (beats per min.)	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.	Pulse rate sustained over 60 bpm when horse is cooled down and calm.
Respiratory rate (breaths per min.)	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.	Signs of congestion: 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
Temperature (degrees Fahrenheit)	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.	Temperatures over 103' F indicate a serious disorder, contact your veterinarian immediately.
Mucous membranes (gums, nostrils)	Pale pink	Observation	Bright red, white, or bluish-purple
Capillary refill time	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.	Over 5 seconds
Hydration	After "pinch test", the skin flattens immediately.	Pinch Test - pinch your horse's neck pulling up, skin should flatten immediately.	If the skin stays "tenting", the horse may be dehydrated.
Gut sounds	You should hear a lot of gurgle noises.	Listen in the area behind ribcage.	Be concerned if you do not hear anything.
Feces	Small, firm fecal balls.	Watch for sand or parasite larva.	Check for Sand Colic or parasites
Pain level in stomach	None	Any sign of abdominal pain	Check Signs of Colic Chart



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