

# Equine First Aid: What to Have and How to Use It

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## Horse Program

Providing research-based information to Minnesota Horse Owners

Almost nothing is scarier than finding your horse injured and not knowing what to do, particularly if you are away from home. The following is a brief guideline for dealing with some common emergencies and essential items for a traveling first aid kit.

### WHAT TO HAVE IN YOUR FIRST AID KIT

- Vet's phone number
- Regional map
- Stethoscope
- Thermometer
- Scissors
- Flashlight and batteries
- Unbreakable bowl
- Latex gloves
- Bandaging material (telfa pads, gauze, cotton sheet or roll, vetwrap, elasticon, tape, duct tape - best if inner layers are sterile)
- Antiseptic scrub and solution (i.e. betadine)
- Sterile saline
- Hemostats
- Pliers (for pulling nails)
- Splint material (i.e. 6" PVC split in half lengthwise)
- Eye ointment
- Diapers or other absorbent pads
- Clean syringe (20cc or larger without needle)

The unbreakable bowl and clean syringe are for water or saline and used for rinsing wounds. The hemostat is for picking out dirt and debris from wounds. The antiseptic scrub should only be used for cleaning wounds when diluted to a weak tea color and should not be used around the eye. The eye ointment can be used for other wounds as well as in the eye. Finally, the diaper can be used to absorb blood or other fluids.

In general, it is safer to call your veterinarian or a referral center than to wait on something that you are unsure about or to medicate the horse yourself. Most importantly, remain calm. If you are nervous (quite natural), contact a friend to help.

### CALL YOUR VETERINARIAN IF:

Vital Signs	Normal	Call if
Temperature	99-100.5°F	over 102°F
Heart Rate* <i>*heart rate is higher in foals</i>	30-44 bpm	over 50 bpm
Respiratory Rate	8-12 bpm	over 30 bpm
Mucous Membranes	pink, moist	dry, tacky or not pink
Capillary Refill Time	1-2 seconds	greater than 3 seconds

*\*Learn to perform these tests BEFORE an emergency, and get to know the normal values for your horse.*

### WHAT TO DO WHILE YOU WAIT

You have called the vet. While you are waiting, there are a few things you can do to help your horse with the following issues.

**Colic:** Keep walking the horse if possible, this helps the discomfort and helps pass manure. The horse can be allowed to lie quietly if it's tired. Remove feed so it doesn't make the blockage any worse. Monitor any vital signs you know (heart rate, mucous membrane color). Give medications ONLY if your veterinarian recommends it or okays it.

**Choke:** Remove food and water. Keep the horse calm and relaxed.

**Wounds:** Clean any contaminated wounds with tap water or sterile saline. Cover with a clean dry bandage. Check to see when your horse last had a tetanus booster. Do not apply ointment to the wound (unless directed by your veterinarian) until your veterinarian arrives.

**Lameness:** Find an outdoor extension cord if x-rays might be needed. If the horse is trying to fall over, put the horse in a stall and stay clear. If the horse can walk to the barn fairly well, move it into a stall near water and

electricity. If the horse might have a fracture and if your horse is close to the barn, stay there; if your horse is out in the paddock, work on finding a way to get the trailer to the horse.

**Nervous system:** Put the horse in a stall with minimal objects (including removing hay and grain to reduce the chance of choke) or in a small area by itself. Make sure everyone leaves the stall or area to avoid injury, and try to decrease stimulation (e.g. avoid other horses moving by, noise, lights).

**Respiratory/Breathing:** Minimize exercise and stress. If it could be strangles, try to isolate the horse, its gear and its caretakers. Take the horse's temperature if it is used to it. If the barn or horse is hot, put cold water along the horse's backbone and/or chest. Clean, cool water should always be available to your horse, especially in an emergency.

**Eyes:** Put your horse in a dark stall.

**Urinary System** (e.g. straining to urinate, discolored urine): Take a heart rate. Collect urine if he/she urinates. Don't exercise the horse.

**Breeding Problems:** If blood is present, try to figure out where it is coming from (check both mare and stallion). Take vital signs that you are comfortable with. If the penis is out, apply cold water using a hose to decrease swelling.

**Foaling problems:** Wrap the mare's tail. Clean the mare's vulva with mild soap and water. Open the membranes if the foal is visible or if you see a thick red sac. Keep the placenta (should be passed within 3 hours).

**Foals:** Milk out the mare if it is safe to do so. Keep the foal quiet if it is premature.

It also helps to have plans ready for other types of

emergencies. Many resources are available at [www.MyHorseMatters.com](http://www.MyHorseMatters.com), a website run by the American Association of Equine Practitioners. Follow the left-hand link to health care tips and articles.

### **In General, Think Twice About:**

1. Medicating. Phenylbutazone can hide signs that your veterinarian will use to assess the problem. Phenylbutazone and Banamine are dangerous when given in the muscle, and Xylazine is bad for people.
2. Interfering with a neurological horse, a stallion, a mare during delivery, or a foal on its way out.
3. Waiting - colic can be fatal if a gut is twisted for 6 hours or more; wounds can enter joints, tendon sheaths, chest or abdomen; eyes can rupture; neurological horses can hurt themselves or someone else; an incomplete tear or fracture can become complete; and foals can become very sick, very quickly.

### **EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AT THE BARN**

- First aid kit
- Veterinary phone numbers
- Names/phone of friends that can assist
- Clear directions to referral center
- Trailering information
- Emergency evacuation plan

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