

Equine Vital Signs



HEART RATE: Use a stethoscope to count the number of heartbeats per minute (bpm) by placing the end of the stethoscope on your horse's left side just behind and at the level of his elbow.

Count each lub-dub as one beat. A normal resting equine heart rate is 28 to 40 bpm.

PULSE: You can also determine your horse's heart rate by taking his pulse. Lightly press your middle and index finger against the maxillary artery (inside of the jawbone) or digital artery (inside the horse's leg, just above the fetlock.) Count the



beats for 15 seconds, then multiply by four to get the beats per minute. Normal resting pulse is 28 to 40 bpm for an adult horse at rest.

GUT SOUNDS: With your stethoscope, listen on both sides of the flank, in the hollows just behind the rib cage and in front of the stifle. You should hear at least two or three active intestinal rumbles over a two-minute period in each quadrant of the flanks. Loud or overactive gut sounds may indicate problems; absolute quiet is a bad sign,

indicating a lack of intestinal motility.



TEMPERATURE: Normal rectal temperature for an adult horse is less than 101 degrees Fahrenheit. Foals may be up to 102. Any temperature above these numbers is considered a fever. Temperature may increase due to excitement or exercise. Standing in the hot sun should not affect a normal horse's rectal temperature.



SKIN PINCH: Pinch the skin over the point of the shoulder and measure how quickly it snaps back into position. It should take less than two seconds to go from a tented position to flat, but this varies from horse to horse. Know what is normal for your horse so you'll notice when there's a change.



MUCOUS MEMBRANES: The gums above your horse's teeth should be pink and moist, like the pink color you see beneath

your fingernails. Pale, brown-tinged mucous membranes or those of a muddy hue are of significant concern. Bright red or purple indicates shock.