

Can You Identify Normal Horse Vital Signs?

Normal Temperature



99.5 - 101.3°F

How to check:

The most accurate way to take a horse's temperature is rectally (dipped in lubricant), using a digital thermometer.

Tips:

- Always be sure to clean the thermometer after use
- Exercise, stress or infections can elevate temperature
- Leave the thermometer in long enough to avoid a false low reading

Normal Pulse



38 - 40 beats/minute

How to check:

There are 3 ideal areas to take your horse's pulse – under the jaw, beneath the tail at its bone or an area on the side of the foot. Count for 15 seconds and multiply by 4.

Tips:

- Don't double count heartbeats
- Foals – 70-120 beats/minute
- Yearlings – 45-60 beats/minute

Normal Respiration



8 - 15 breaths/minute

How to check:

Watching your horse's ribcage or nostrils for 1 minute, count 1 inhale and 1 exhale as a single breath.

Tips:

- Do not measure respiration by letting your horse sniff your hand
- Wait for 30 minutes after exercise to check rate
- Respiration rate should not exceed pulse rate

Dehydration



Skin takes more than 2 seconds to return to place

How to check:

Pinch the skin on your horse's neck or shoulder area and it should return to its normal place within 1-2 seconds.

Tips:

- Horses need 5-12 gallons of water per day in normal environments
- In heat or with heavy exercise, horses need 15-20 gallons of water per day

Normal Gut Sound



Gurgling, sound of fluid dripping/tinkling

How to check:

Place ear or a stethoscope up against horse's body, just behind the last rib, checking both sides.

Tips:

- Call the vet if there is an absence of sound, as it could indicate colic

Normal Capillary Refill Time



1 - 2 seconds

How to check:

Place finger against horse's gums for 2 seconds, creating a white mark from finger pressure. The white mark should return to normal pink tone within 1-2 seconds.

Other Tips



- Be sure to check vital signs regularly to know what is normal, so you can identify anything abnormal
- Do not take vital measurements on a nervous horse, to ensure accuracy
- Call your veterinarian immediately if anything is abnormal

References

National Research Council. 2007. Nutrient Requirements of Horses, Sixth Revised Edition. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.



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