

## What To Do Until The Vet Arrives

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Emergency situations with your horse are stressful for both the owner and the horse. Unfortunately the wait for the vet to arrive to help you and your horse can be agonizing. However there are several things you can do to assess and apply appropriate first aid for your horse until the veterinarian arrives.

In an emergency with your horse, whether you are dealing with depression, colic, wounds, or fractures it is important that you are prepared! Preparation will be both mental and physical. Knowledge will be your mental preparation. Physical preparation will take many forms and the type of emergency will dictate the different types of physical preparations that are necessary. There are some basic physical preparations you should always make in advance, such as having a well-stocked first aid kit. First aid kits should contain at a minimum a thermometer for taking your horse's temperature and enough bandage material for a complete compression bandage. While these are the minimum, there are many more useful items to incorporate into a well-stocked first aid kit and your veterinarian can help you decide what supplies and medicines they think are necessary. In addition to building the kit it is important to also know when and how to use each item it contains.

Correct application of a bandage is a skill every horse owner should have. Some people use standing wraps regularly and for those of you that do not, learning how to apply a proper leg bandage is essential. When you are faced with a wound, controlling any bleeding is the first priority. A pressure bandage should be applied. If it continues to bleed through the bandage, apply more layers. Never remove that initial bandage, just add more layers. Removal can disrupt any clotting that is starting to occur and can make the hemorrhage worse. Even if not actively bleeding applying a good bandage over an injury is advised. Most importantly it will help decrease swelling, which makes the veterinarian's job easier in assessing

and treating wounds or other leg injuries. In addition, a well-placed bandage can help with pain control, reduce further contamination, and stabilize the injured tissues. You do not always have to thoroughly clean a wound prior to placing a bandage. In some cases, like when a wound is over a joint, you don't want to risk further contamination of the joint by pushing dirt and debris further in. A better approach, if you are suspicious the wound is around a joint, would be to clean off the surface debris and then cover the wound and place the bandage. Your veterinarian will then make the final assessment and carefully clean the wound to avoid complications.

Assessing your horse to provide as much information to your veterinarian as well as to be able to follow trends in the progression of your horse injury or illness can be valuable information. Knowing anatomy and correct anatomic terms can help you accurately describe the location of an injury. Objective measures such as temperature, heart rate, and respiratory rate are very important values that all horse owners should be able to obtain. Temperature is taken rectally. A digital thermometer available at any drug store can be used. Normal temperature range in the adult horse is from 99.0 to 101.5°F. In a majority of cases you will be looking for an elevation in temperature. Heart rates in horses ranges from 28-44 beats per minute. Heart rate can be taken by palpating a pulse, just like they do in people. Locations for palpating a pulse include behind the elbow on the left side of the chest (location of the heart), on the inside of the jaw (where jaw meets the cheek), and just under the facial crest, are some of the reliable places to acquire a heart rate. You can also listen for the heart rate with a stethoscope, inexpensive ones can be purchased for under \$10, making them a good addition to your first-aid kit. Respiratory rates can be obtained by watching or feeling the rise and fall of the chest. Normal respiratory rates are 10-24 breaths per minute. Heart rates and respiratory rates can be elevated due to pain or illnesses causing physiologic changes in the body. It is not unusual to find an elevated heart rate in a horse that has a lot of pain from severe colic. However what surprises some, and indicates that there may be something more severe going on than is readily apparent, is finding a

heart rate of 80 beats per minute in a horse that is standing there looking a little depressed. If you don't check you may not know how serious the situation may actually be!

Emergency situations, whether they are accident or illness, can be overwhelming. Taking a few steps to prepare yourself physically and mentally will help you help your horse and your veterinarian. So take steps now to evaluate your knowledge base as well as your first aid kit so that you are ready when the situation arises!

Contact Brandon Equine Medical Center at 813-643-7177 or email [info@brandonequine.com](mailto:info@brandonequine.com) with any questions regarding this topic.

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