



Equine vital signs: What's normal?

WHAT YOU WILL NEED



Stethoscope



Digital thermometer



Timer

Skin pinch test:

To test the hydration status of your horse, pinch a section of skin on the neck into a "tent." Upon releasing the tent, the skin should flatten and return to normal in 1–2 seconds. Skin that does not return to normal in this short time is indicative of a dehydrated horse.

Mucous membranes:

Mucous membranes (around the gums inside the horse's mouth, inside the nostrils and around the eyes) should be moist and pink in color.

Capillary refill time:

Lift your horse's upper lip and push one of your fingers against its gums for a couple of seconds to create a white mark. The area should return to its normal pink color (as the capillaries refill with blood) in 1–2 seconds.

Gut sounds:

There are four quadrants of your horse's digestive tract: the upper right, lower right, upper left and lower left. Use a stethoscope in these four areas and listen for gut sounds such as gurgling, tinkling and semi-frequent roars. Prolonged silence may be indicative of a potentially serious issue requiring prompt veterinary assistance.

Reminders:

1. Be safe. Taking any vital signs without appropriately preparing your horse can be dangerous. Take the time to ensure your safety and the safety of any other handlers, as well as the animal.
2. The vital sign indicators here are for a horse AT REST. Be sure to measure these vital signs before the horse does any work in order to ensure optimal consistency and accuracy.
3. While these ranges are useful, each individual horse's "normal" will vary slightly. Keep an eye on any changes from your horse's normal vital signs and consult with your veterinarian if something seems amiss.

Temperature

Adult: 99–101 degrees F
Foal: 99.5–102.1 degrees F

To take a horse's temperature, use a digital rectal thermometer that is lubricated and clean. It is a good idea to take a horse's temperature last, as the act of using a thermometer could increase heart and respiratory rates. Always be safe and take your time letting the horse get used to having its temperature taken.



Pulse (heart rate)

Adult: 28–44 beats per minute
Foal: 80–100 beats per minute

A horse's pulse can be taken in multiple ways. For the most accurate reading, use a stethoscope on the left side of the horse's body in the heart-girth area, directly behind the elbow. Remember that two sounds ("lub-dub") count for one beat. Alternatively, you can also take the pulse by placing your fingers on the lingual artery underneath the jaw. Either way, measure the pulse for 15 seconds and multiply that number by four to determine beats per minute.



Respiratory rate

Adult: 10–24 breaths per minute
Foal: 20–40 breaths per minute

To measure the respiratory rate, watch the horse's rib or flank area to count inhalation and exhalation for 30 seconds, multiplying the total by two to determine breaths per minute. Be sure to count one inhale and one exhale as one breath.

