

The U&A Bulletin

U N I O N V I L L E E Q U I N E A S S O C I A T E S , P . C .

Equine First Aid Kit

First aid kits can be simple or elaborate. Listed below are some essential items.

(*Materials should be sterile)

- *Cotton roll
- *Contact bandage
- *Cling wrap
- *Gauze pads, various sizes
- *Gauze wrap
- *Adhesive wrap & tape
- Leg wraps
- Sharp scissors
- Hemostats
- Steel cup or container
- Rectal thermometer with string and clip attached
- Surgical scrub
- Antiseptic solution
- Latex gloves
- Flashlight and spare batteries
- Permanent marker pen
- Pliers (to pull nails)
- Epsom Salts

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First Aid Tips

If you own horses long enough, sooner or later you are likely to confront a medical emergency. There are several behavioral traits that make horses especially accident-prone: one is their instinctive flight-or-fight response; another is their dominance hierarchy -- the need to establish the pecking order within a herd; and a third is their natural curiosity. Such behaviors account for many of the cuts, bruises, and abrasions that horses suffer. In fact, lacerations are probably the most common emergency that horse owners must contend with. There are other types of emergencies as well, such as colic, foaling difficulties, acute lameness, seizures, and illness. As a horse owner, you must know how to recognize serious problems and respond promptly, taking appropriate action while awaiting the arrival of your veterinarian.

When a horse is cut or bleeding, it's obvious that there is a problem. But in cases of colic, illness, or a more subtle injury, it may not be as apparent. That's why it's important to know your horse's normal vital signs, including temperature, pulse and respiration (TPR), as well as its normal behavior patterns. You must be a good observer so that you readily recognize signs of ill health.

There will be variations in individual temperature, pulse and respiration values. Take several baseline measurements when the horse is healthy, rested, and relaxed. Write them down and keep them within easy reach, perhaps with your first aid kit, so you have them to compare to in case of an emergency. Normal ranges for adult horses are:

- Pulse rate: 30-42 beats per minute
- Respiratory rate: 12-20 breaths per minute
- Rectal temperature: 99.5' to 101.5' F. If the horse's temperature exceeds 102.5' F., contact your veterinarian immediately. Temperatures of over 103' F indicate a serious disorder.
- Capillary refill time (time it takes for color to return to gum tissue adjacent to teeth after pressing and releasing with your thumb): 2 seconds.

Continued

First Aid Continued . .

Other observations you should note:

- Skin pliability is tested by pinching or folding a flap of neck skin and releasing. It should immediately snap back into place. Failure to do so could indicate dehydration.
- Color of the mucous membranes of gums, nostrils, conjunctiva (inner eye tissue), and inner lips of vulva should be pink. Bright red, pale pink to white, or bluish-purple coloring may indicate problems
- Color, consistency, and volume of feces and urine should be typical of that individual's usual excretions. Straining or failure to excrete should be noted.
- Signs of distress, anxiety or discomfort
- Lethargy, depression or a horse that's "off-feed"
- Presence or absence of gut sounds
- Evidence of lameness such as head-bobbing, reluctance to move, odd stance, pain, unwillingness to rise
- Bleeding, swelling, evidence of pain
- Seizures, paralysis, or "tying up" (form of muscle cramps that ranges in severity from mild stiffness to life-threatening illness).

No matter what emergency you may face in the future, mentally rehearse what steps you will take to avoid letting panic take control. Here are some guidelines to help you prepare:

1. Keep your veterinarian's number by each phone, including how the practitioner can be reached after-hours. If you have a speed dial system, key it in, but also keep the number posted.
2. Know in advance the most direct route to an equine surgery center in case you need to transport the horse.
3. Post the names and phone numbers of nearby friends and neighbors who can assist you in an emergency while you wait for the veterinarian.
4. Prepare a first aid kit and store it in a clean, dry, readily accessible place. Make sure that family members and other barn users know where the kit is.
5. Also keep a first aid kit in your horse trailer or towing vehicle, and a pared-down version to carry on the trail.

Many accidents can be prevented by taking the time to evaluate your horse's environment and removing potential hazards. Also, assess your management routines to make them safer. Mentally rehearse your emergency action plan. Preparation will help you stay calm in the event of a real emergency. Keep your veterinarian's phone number and your first aid kit handy. In an emergency, time is critical. Don't be concerned with overreacting or annoying your veterinarian. By acting quickly and promptly, you can minimize the consequences of an injury or illness. Your horse's health and well-being depend on it.

Unionville Equine Associates, P.C.
25 Webster Lane
Oxford, PA 19363
www.ueavet.com