



When It's Time to Call the Vet

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Although certain illnesses and conditions will have obvious signs and indicators that a veterinarian should be called, others may not. It is critical to know the normal behavior, attitude, and gait of your horses, since changes that could require veterinary attention may be subtle at first. No one knows your horse better than you. Learn how to take your horse's heart rate (normal 28-48 beats per minute), respiratory rate (10-20 breaths per minute), and temperature (99-101.5°F), and know the normal values for your horse. Be familiar with normal gum color (light pink) and capillary refill time (less than 2 seconds). Understanding normal for your horse will help you identify subtle changes, and improve communication with your veterinarian.

Equally important as knowing when to call your vet, is having a plan for emergencies. Keep important phone numbers readily available, have a plan for transportation if your horse requires referral to a hospital, and keep a first aid kit on the farm and in your trailer. Consider discussing a backup veterinarian with your vet in case they are unavailable. Keeping directions and maps available to local veterinary hospitals may help expedite travel should that be necessary. Most importantly, remember to stay calm and call your vet sooner rather than later if you suspect a problem.

When should I call the vet about my....

Foal:

Remember the 1-2-3 Rule! 1 hour to stand, 2 hours to nurse, and 3 hours for the mare to pass the placenta. If any of these are broken – call your vet!

Mare has no milk, foal not nursing, IgG low (not enough colostrum)

All foals should be evaluated by a veterinarian within 12-24 hours of birth to ensure adequate passive transfer

Diarrhea in first few days of life or any diarrhea that persists

Fever (Temperature > 102°F)

Behavior abnormal

Seizures or other neurological signs

Unable to stand

Colic, Bloating

Milk coming out nose

Difficulty breathing or increased respiratory rate

Any abnormalities with the eye – tearing, squinting, swelling, cloudy appearance

Straining to urinate or defecate

Lame, swollen joint or joints

Call if any doubts or questions

Yearlings and Adults: see Specific Symptoms and Conditions

Older Horse: Also see specific symptoms and conditions

Losing weight

Not eating well
Dropping feed or difficulty chewing may indicate dental disease
Not shedding out in spring/ long, curly hair coat
Drinking and/or urinating excessively
Lameness

Reminders for veterinary calls in the...

Spring:

Routine Vaccination of adults
Discuss deworming schedule for the year/ fecal exams
Annual Physical/wellness examination
Breeding soundness exams on mares and stallions
Foal wellness exam in first 12-24 hours of life and IgG check

Summer

Begin vaccination series for weanlings at 4-6 months of age
Deworming foals and weanlings begin at 30-60 days of age

Fall

Vaccination boosters, 2nd dose weanlings
Annual dental exam (any time of year)
Wellness Examination

Winter

Vaccination 3rd dose weanlings

Any time of year:

If you are purchasing a new horse, call your veterinarian for a thorough physical and soundness examination.
Any time you suspect an emergency or note any of the symptoms listed below

Specific Symptoms and Conditions:

Call the vet if your horse has...

Fever (Temp > 101.5°F adult, >102°F foal): Temperatures over 103 F indicate a serious problem, and your horse should be placed in a cool area with fans and hosed off until the vet arrives.

Abnormal gum color (red, purple, white, or yellow)

Squinting, swollen, cloudy or tearing eye

Yellow or green nasal discharge

Loss of appetite or difficulty eating

Chronic cough

Sweating profusely

Lame (head-bobbing, reluctant to walk or trot, laying down more than usual)

Unable to get up

Unable to move

Gait uncoordinated (ataxia) or stumbling excessively
Seizures or collapse
Profuse bleeding, deep wounds or lacerations
Difficulty breathing (nostril flare, distressed, increased respiratory rate)
Injury over a joint, tendon, or on the bottom of the foot
Depression or anxiety
Diarrhea (more than loose manure from excitement/trailering)
Blood in the urine
Heat stress
Unusual swelling or suspected bite (snake, spider, etc)
Mare is foaling and there is no progression in 10-15 minutes from water breaking:
 normal deliveries take 30-40 minutes from water break to foal on the ground.

Colic:

Pawing, rolling, stretching out, flank watching
Sooner is ALWAYS better than later – Call when you notice a problem!
Signs are severe or unrelenting
Persistent pain despite initial treatment with pain reliever/sedatives
High heart rate/respiratory rate/abnormal gums
Chronic, mild signs of colic

Remember that this list is not exhaustive. If you have specific concerns about your horse's condition, it is always better to call and discuss them with your veterinarian. Earlier diagnosis and treatment typically provides you and your horse with the best possible outcome.

Recommended First Aid Kit Supplies:

Thermometer (Digital thermometers work well)
Stethoscope
Scissors
Adhesive tape and duct tape
Hemostats
Leg wraps
Soap
Flashlight
Clippers
Phone numbers
Latex gloves
Antiseptics (Chlorahexidine, Betadine solution)
Wound dressing
Hoof pick and knife
Phenylbutazone (Bute)
Bottles of sterile saline
PVC pipe for splinting
Sterile bandage materials: roll cotton, gauze pads, Cling wrap
Sheet cotton

Elastikon®
Vetwrap®