



## **When It's Time to Call the Vet**

Amanda Martabano House, DVM, Diplomate ACVIM (Large Animal)  
University of Florida College of Veterinary medicine

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, 2<sup>nd</sup> dose weanlings  
Annual dental exam (any time of year)  
Wellness Examination

#### **Winter**

Vaccination 3<sup>rd</sup> 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®