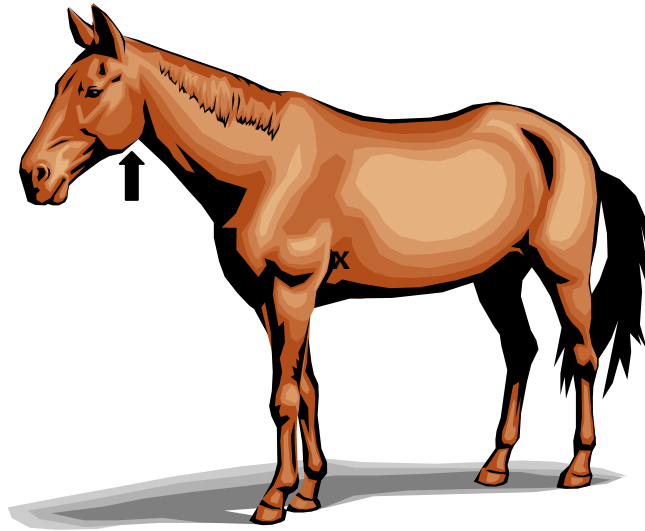


Taking Vital Signs:

Being able to take your horse's vital signs during a time of illness or injury is an important part of being a horse owner. Vital signs help the veterinarian assess the situation before he or she arrives.

- **Heart Rate/Pulse** – A normal resting heart rate for an adult horse is 30-44 beats per minute.
 - Hints – a heart rate can be checked using the pulse under the jaw or by listening to the heart with a stethoscope. Count the number of beats for either one minute or for 15 seconds and multiply by four. Each “lub-dup” of the heart is considered one beat.
 - The easiest place to take the pulse is the facial artery located just under the jaw. While the horse is under control and quiet, curl your fingers and place them in the groove between your horse's jaws. Pull your fingers back until you feel a cordlike structure between the skin and bone on the bottom edge of the jawbone about 1 inch behind the junction of the rounded cheek and the straight jawbone (see arrow below). Press that against the jawbone and you will feel the pulse.



- The best place to hear the heart beat with a stethoscope is on the rib cage behind the horse's left elbow (see x above). Press the stethoscope firmly against the skin.
- **Respiratory rate** – Normal respiratory rate is 8-12 breaths per minute at rest.
 - The respiratory rate can be taken by watching the horse's chest move in and out (each inhale and exhale is one breath) or by feeling the air come out of the nostrils or watching the nostrils flare.
 - For either method, count the breaths for 30 seconds and multiply that number by 2 to calculate breaths per minute. Or count the breaths for 1 minute.
- **Temperature** – Normal rectal temperature for an adult horse is 99-101.0° Fahrenheit. For a newborn foal up to 3 days of age the normal temperature is 100.0-102.0° Fahrenheit.
 - The horse's temperature can be taken rectally either with a glass/mercury or digital thermometer.

- **Mucous membranes (gums)** – The gums should be a nice even pink color and should be moist to the touch.
- **Capillary refill time** – Capillary refill time should be less than 2 seconds. To evaluate the capillary refill time lift the horse's upper lip and press your finger firmly on the gum, then take it away. Count the number of seconds it takes for the area you pressed against to turn from white back to pink.

If any of the above vital signs are out of the normal range or you are having difficulty taking the vitals please contact your veterinarian for further consultation.