**1. TEMPERATURE**

Normal body temperature is **99 - 101 F**. A temperature higher than that, may indicate an infection. A healthy horse's temperature can vary by **3** degrees depending on environmental factors. Horses tend to have higher temperatures in warm weather and during/after exercise, stress or excitement. A high fever doesn't always indicate a severe condition, but it is a good idea to take your horse's temperature often and if you his temperature is over 102 F, you should call your veterinarian.

**How To Take a Horse's Temperature:**

The most accurate way to take a horse's temperature is rectally. Always secure a string to the end of the thermometer, so that it doesn't get lost (some of you know what I'm talking about, or have experienced it...it's not very fun). Tack shops and pharmacies sell all types of thermometers. Plastic digital thermometers work very well and are generally easier to use, and most of them beep when they are done. Be sure that if you use an older mercury-type thermometer, which you shake down the mercury before taking the horse's temperature.

The horse should be tied or held still by an assistant. Lubricate the tip of the thermometer with petroleum jelly, Vaseline or saliva. Move the horse's tail to the side and out of the way and insert the thermometer into the horse's rectum, angled slightly towards the ground. Do not stand directly behind the horse, because some horses don't like this - but most don't mind. For the most accurate reading, leave the thermometer in position for at least 3 minutes. Many digital thermometers work well in less than 1 minute.

**Always clean the thermometer well before returning it to its case...and especially if used on an ill horse, to prevent the spreading of an illness.**

**2. PULSE**

The pulse rate of an adult horse at rest averages 30-40 beats per minute (bpm). A pulse rate of 50 or higher in an adult horse at rest may mean the horse is in physical distress. The average pulse rates for young horses are as follows:
**Foals** (70-120 bpm), **Yearlings** (45-60 bpm), **and 2yr. olds** (40-50 bpm).

The horse's pulse rate will increase if he is excited or nervous, in pain, during/after exercise, or has a disease. The higher the heart rate, the more severe the condition.

**How To Check a Horse's Pulse:**

The horse's pulse can be found near the front of the left jawbone. Under the jawbone, there is a major artery that sticks out slightly. Using your forefinger (never your thumb - because you may feel your own pulse), press against the artery firmly. Use a clock or counter to time a 15 second period. Multiply the number of beats you counted by 4.

**You may also place your hand or a stethoscope behind the horse's left elbow to take his pulse. Be sure to count each lub-dub as 1 beat.**

**3. RESPIRATION**

The average respiration rate of an adult horse at rest is **8-15 breaths per minute**. A horse's respiration rate increases with hot or humid weather, exercise, fever or pain. Rapid breathing at rest should recieve veterinary attention, and keep in mind that the respiration rate should **NEVER** exceed the pulse rate. A horse should also spend equal time inhaling and exhaling.

**How To The Respiration Rate:**

Watch or feel your horse's ribcage/belly for one minute. Be sure to count 1 inhale and 1 exhale as one breath (not as two). Each breath is fairly slow. If you are having difficulty seeing the ribcage move, try watching the horse's nostrils or place your hand in front of the nostrils to feel the horse exhale.

An even better method is to place a stethoscope to the horse's windpipe to listen to his breathing. This will also give you strange sounds if the horse's windpipe is blocked by mucous or if the he has allergies or heaves.

**4. GUT SOUNDS**

The gut sounds that come from your horse's stomach and intestines can be very important information for your vet to diagnose an illness. Gut sounds should always be present. The absence of gut sounds is **more** indicative of a problem than excessive gut sounds. Usually, an absence of gut sounds indicates colic. If you don't hear any sounds, contact your veterinarian.

**How To Check for Gut Sounds:**

Press your ear up againts your horse's barrel just behind his last rib. If you hear gurgling noises, he's fine. Be sure to check gut sounds from both sides.

**If you do not hear any sounds, try using a stethoscope in the same area.**

**5. DEHYDRATION**

Healthy horses drink a minimum of **5 gallons** of water per day. If your horse is dehydrated, it is very important that you urge him to drink. If he refuses to drink water, try adding flavor to it (gatorade or apple juice is ideal), and contact your veterinarian if he still won't drink.

**How To Perform a Pinch Test:**

Pinch the skin on your horse's neck. If the skin flattens back into place when you let go in less than 1 second, the horse is fine. If it doesn't, it means he isn't drinking enough water, he is dehydrated.

**The longer the skin stays pinched up before flattening, the more dehydrated he is.**

**6. CAPILLARY REFILL TIME (CRT)**

Capillary Refill Time (CRT) is the time it takes for blood to return to blanched tissues in the gums. This is an indicator of **blood circulation**. Normal refill time is 1 to 2 seconds.

**How To Check CRT:**

Lift your horse's upper lip up and firmly press your thumb against his gums for 2 seconds to create a white mark. This white mark should return to the normal pink color within 1-2 seconds after releasing the pressure.

**If the CRT takes longer than 2 seconds, the horse may have shock.**

**7. MUCOUS MEMBRANES**

The mucous membranes are the lining of a horse's eyelids, his gums and the inside of his nostrils. The color of the mucous membranes are another indicator of **blood circulation**. A healthy horse's gums are slightly more pale than a humans. If a horse's gums are very pale, bright red, grayish blue or bright yellow, call a veterinarian immediately.

**Color of Mucous Membranes:**

*Moist Pink:* Healthy normal circulation.
*Very Pale Pink:* Capillaries contracted, indicates fever, blood loss or anemia.
*Bright Red:* Capillaries enlarged, indicates toxicity or mild shock.
*Gray or Blue:* Severe shock, depression and illness.
*Bright Yellow:* Associated with liver problems.