

Horse Vital Signs

Vital signs—temperature, pulse, and respiration—help in diagnosing abnormalities. Learn what your horse's normal vital signs are, as they vary by situation and by horse. Remember that if a horse has been exercising, it is normal for pulse, respiration, and temperature to be higher.

Pulse: Normal Range: 28-44 beats/minute. Use stethoscope to take pulse rate behind the horse's left elbow. The pulse is a deep drumming sound. You may need to move the stethoscope around to find it. Count beats for 15 seconds then multiply by 4.

Respiration: Normal Range: 8-20 breaths/minute. Watch the horse's ribs rise and fall and listen for breathing. Count breaths for 15 seconds and multiply by 4.

Temperature: Normal Range: 99-101°F (37.2-38.3°C). Take a horse's temperature rectally. Use an inexpensive digital thermometer and carefully insert in rectum.

Capillary Refill Time: Normal Range: 1-2 seconds. Open the horse's mouth and press finger onto the gum, just above a tooth. This will cause the gum to turn white briefly. Count how long it takes for blood to refill the white area. Gums should be healthy pink and moist. If they are purple or pale, they could be experiencing shock.

Taken from: *Western Horseman* Nov. 2002. p. 112.

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