Emergencies: Horse First Aid Information

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Horses may suffer a variety of wounds and injuries. A rub against the fence post in the pasture can cause an abrasion. Other horses at competitions and shows may bite. A thorn bush on the riding trail can cut a leg. A loosened nail near the wash stall might puncture their gaskin.

In fact, it sometimes seems as though the world is filled with objects that can wound your horse. But there are also a variety of first aid ointments, salves, dressings, and sprays you can use to care for your horse's wounds. The key, however, is to understand how abrasions, animal bites, lacerations, and puncture wounds affect your horse so you can better help heal her injuries and protect her health.

Wounds and Treatments Defined

Horse wounds vary when it comes to shape, size, and severity. Regardless of how your horse received her wound or where it is located on her body, however, all wounds fall into four basic categories. The type of first aid you administer depends, in part, on the wound type, which is based on the following criteria:

Wound Type	Definition	First Aid Treatment
Abrasion	Superficial wound. Usually not critical, unless caused by a fall; however, abrasions can be very painful. Occurs when your horse scrapes herself against a rough surface, or as a result of a poorly fitting saddle or saddle blanket.	Stop any bleeding. Clean the wound with an iodine-based solution, such as Povidone-10%. Apply an antiseptic ointment. Do not bandage the area. Contact your veterinarian if a fall caused the abrasion, or if the abrasion is large.
Animal Bite	Animal bites can be very serious, especially if they are deep or cause puncture wounds (i.e. bites from cats). Tetanus and rabies vaccinations will help protect your horse - keep vaccinations current.	Clean a superficial bite with an iodine-based solution, such as Povidone-10% and check with your veterinarian. Deep bites may need a course of antibiotics - call your veterinarian immediately.
Laceration	Severity varies, depending on cut size, wound depth, and blood loss. Caused by any object that can cut your horse's skin.	Flush out minor wounds with Povidone-10% and apply an antiseptic ointment. Stop bleeding on large or deep lacerations and immediately contact your veterinarian.
Puncture	Should always be considered a severe, and critical, wound because the possibility of tetanus and other infections are high. Caused by sharp objects that penetrate deep into the skin, muscles, or hooves.	Call your veterinarian immediately. Unless bleeding is profuse, do not attempt to stop it as the bleeding helps flush out foreign objects and bacteria.

How to Stop Bleeding

Almost all wounds result in at least some blood loss. But in most instances, the actual amount of blood lost from a wound appears worse than it really is. However, all bleeding should be controlled, if not stopped altogether. The key is to remain

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calm and keep the following tips in mind:

- **Assess the situation** - if a wound affects an artery, bright red blood will spurt from the wound. If this is the case, take immediate action. However, darker red blood, with no spurting, generally signals that the blood originates in a vein. Unless it is a large vein, it is not immediately life threatening.
- **Calm your horse** - the more your horse moves, the more her wound will bleed. To help calm her, talk to her in a soft voice and keep her still in one place. Keep people and other animals around your horse quiet.
- **Apply pressure** - use a clean and preferably sterile bandage or clean towel in the case of a larger wound to apply pressure to the wound area. This will help reduce bleeding.

As in any first aid situation, act quickly and smartly. In most cases, however, at least a little time is on your side. The average 1,200-pound horse has about twelve gallons of blood, though the actual amount varies from breed to breed. As a general rule, most animals can lose up to 10% of their blood volume before shock due to blood loss begins. For the average horse, this equals approximately a little over one gallon of blood. How rapidly the blood loss occurs and the severity of the trauma also play a role in the development of shock. If shock has begun, contact your veterinarian immediately. The signs of shock due to blood loss include:

- Weakness
- Whole body sweating
- Colic
- Progressively elevated heart rate
- Pale/White mucous membranes

Wound Care Tips

Unfortunately, no two horse wounds are identical. However, by quickly assessing the situation and acting appropriately most wounds heal and your horse will make a full recovery. True, some injuries can turn even the calmest horse owner into a nervous wreck. But when injured, what your horse needs most is for you to remain calm and focused on getting her the help she needs. It helps if you are prepared with a suitable first aid kit assembled from select horse supplies. In addition, keep the following tips in mind:

- **Stay Calm** - you can better help your horse when you're calm and collected.
- **Call for Help** - an additional pair of hands will get more done faster.
- **Stay Safe** - you won't be able to help your horse if you get hurt trying to help her.
- **Wash Your Hands** - avoid wound contamination by washing hands and wearing gloves.
- **Keep Your Horse Vaccinated** - current vaccinations help protect your horse from a range of serious conditions, some of which can result from wounds. This is especially true of tetanus (lockjaw).
- **Contact your veterinarian** - it's better to be safe than sorry. Your veterinarian is the best person to instruct you in first aid and determine if veterinary assistance is necessary.

Easy access to your veterinarian's and farrier's contact information is vital in any first aid situation. In addition, a complete record of all your horse's medications, vaccinations, and wormers is essential - especially in an emergency. The best way to track all of this information is with your FREE Horse Health Record.

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