

BOB LANGRISH



# Vital signs

Gauge your horse's internal condition by monitoring these six indicators of his health status.

SIGN	METHOD FOR MONITORING	NORMAL READING	RED ALERT <i>Call your veterinarian immediately.</i>
<b>pulse</b>	Place three fingers against the thick artery that runs underneath the cheekbone on each side of the face. Press inward and upward. Count each surge of blood for 30 seconds. Multiply by two.	at rest, approximately 30 to 40 beats per minute	greater than 60 beats per minute in a resting horse; weak; irregular
<b>respiration rate</b>	Stand about 12 inches from the horse's shoulder, facing his hindquarters. Focus on the dimple at the front of his stifle joint. Shift your gaze to the curved outline of his belly, where his body color stands out against the ground behind him. Count either each expansion or relaxation of the belly at the flank for one minute.	between 6 and 20 breaths per minute, depending on the horse's size and the ambient temperature	unusual flare of nostrils; foam or chewed food in nostrils; short breaths in a resting horse; exaggerated rib movements with each breath
<b>temperature</b>	Lubricate a digital thermometer. Stand beside the horse's rump, facing his tail. Lift his tail, and insert the thermometer into his anus. Keep it in place for as long as the manufacturer recommends. Remove it and note the reading.	between 99.5 and 101 degrees Fahrenheit	higher than 104 degrees Fahrenheit; cold and/or patchy sweating
<b>hydration level: capillary-refill time</b>	Pressure-blanch a spot on the horse's gum just above the corner incisor. Remove your thumb and count the seconds it takes for color to return.	2 seconds or less	refill time greater than 3 seconds; dark-red, brown, yellow or blue gums or nostril lining
<b>hydration level: pinch test</b>	Pinch a small amount of skin at the point of the shoulder into a fold about three-quarters of an inch high. Release it and watch how quickly it returns to normal.	an immediate return indicates the horse is well hydrated	a fold that remains or flattens slowly indicates dehydration
<b>intestinal sounds</b>	Hold a lock of mane near the withers in your left hand. Bend over and place your left ear against the horse's stomach behind his ribs and in front of his stifle. Repeat on the right side.	a symphony of assorted gurgles, squeaks, pippings and scrapings on both sides	faint, infrequent gut sounds on both sides