

First Aid for Horses

When it comes to our equine friends, knowing how to spot injuries and provide proper first aid is crucial. It's not just about being able to treat them; it's also about recognising when it's time to call in the professionals. If you're ever unsure, don't hesitate to reach out to your vet for guidance.



Daily Checks

Make it a habit to thoroughly check your horse for any signs of injury as part of their daily health routine. This way, you can catch any issues before they escalate.

Essential First Aid Kit

Having a well-stocked first aid kit is a must for every horse owner. Keep it in a dry, clean box in your tack room or stable, and label it clearly with your vet's contact details. Here's a handy list of what to include:

- A clean towel
- A bowl (preferably clean)
- Disposable gloves
- A thermometer and some petroleum jelly for taking temperatures
- Tweezers
- A head torch for examining wounds in low light
- Ready-to-use poultice
- Salt for making saline solution

- Sterile saline solution, especially if clean water isn't available
- A roll of cotton wool
- Scissors for trimming hair around wounds
- Stable bandages
- Elasticated bandages or vet wrap
- Syringes of various sizes for flushing wounds
- Sterile gauze swabs
- Wound powder

And don't forget to replace any used or expired items right away!

Pro Tip: Consider having a travel first aid kit ready in your horsebox for shows or while you're out and about.



Types of Wounds

Understanding the different types of wounds can help you gauge how serious an injury might be. Here are a few common types:

- **Clean-cut (Incised Cut):** These are sharp, clean cuts that can bleed heavily. The edges look straight, but the wound might be deeper than it seems.
- **Torn (Lacerated Cut):** Caused by blunt objects, these wounds have jagged edges and usually bleed less than clean cuts, but swelling and debris are common.

- **Puncture Wound:** Resulting from something sharp like a nail or thorn, these wounds can be deceptively small but may go deep, making them prone to infection.
- **Grazes (Abrasions):** Often minor, grazes can still lead to infection and may take time to heal, often accompanied by bruising.
- **Overreach Injuries:** Occurring when a horse's back foot hits the front foot, these can cause small cuts but may also lead to serious wounds. Using overreach boots can help prevent these injuries.
- **Bruises, Lumps, Swellings, and Inflammation:** These can signal an underlying injury, so it's best to consult your vet if you spot any.

First Aid Steps



If you find a wound on your horse, your main goals should be to:

1. Stop any bleeding.
2. Check for foreign objects.
3. Clean the wound to prevent infection.
4. Promote healing as effectively as possible.

Cuts and grazes are the most common injuries needing first aid, so act quickly and consult your vet if you're concerned.

Important: If your horse has a wound and isn't vaccinated against tetanus, reach out to your vet immediately!

Stopping Bleeding

To treat your horse's wound, stopping the bleeding is your first priority. Here's how to handle different types of bleeding:

- **Arterial Bleeding:** This is a serious emergency. The blood will be bright red and pulsating. Call your vet immediately while applying pressure to the wound with a clean dressing if possible. If blood seeps through the bandage, don't remove it—just add another layer on top.
- **Venous Bleeding:** If the blood is dark red and flows steadily, this is also serious. Apply pressure and contact your vet right away.
- **Capillary Bleeding:** This is less severe, often characterised by slow oozing. You can usually manage this type of bleeding with cold hosing.



Cleaning the Wound

After addressing the bleeding, it's time to clean the wound (unless you're waiting for your vet). Here are two effective methods:

- **Bathing:** Use sterile gauze swabs soaked in warm salty water or saline solution. Gently dab the wound, wiping from the outside in to avoid introducing dirt.
- **Cold Hosing:** Ideal for leg injuries, this involves a steady stream of cold water. Ensure your horse is comfortable with the process, starting at their hooves and gradually moving to the wound. Aim to hold the water over the injury for up to 15 minutes if they tolerate it.

Pro Tip: If your horse is unfamiliar with cold hosing, take the time to train them to accept it. It'll make things easier if an injury arises.

Dealing with Foreign Objects

If you find a foreign object in your horse's wound, like dirt or glass, gently clean it if it's safe to do so. However, if there's a large object embedded, don't attempt to remove it; this could cause further harm. Contact your vet for their expertise.

Dressing the Wound

Once the wound is clean, dressing it can help facilitate healing. For minor wounds,



wound powder [shutterstock.com · 2080530448](https://www.shutterstock.com/2080530448) or cream may suffice. For larger injuries:

1. Place a dressing pad over the wound and secure it with a soft bandage.
2. Wrap a layer of cotton wool or clean gamgee to provide additional protection, securing it with a stable bandage.
3. Consider using a stable bandage on the opposite leg for added support.

If you're unsure how to dress a wound properly, ask your vet for a demonstration. Incorrect dressing can hinder healing.

Poulticing is another option for drawing out infection. You can apply poultice dressings either hot or cold.

Recognising an Emergency

It's vital to recognise when your horse is facing a health emergency. You should always call your vet if your horse:

- Is bleeding heavily from an artery or vein

- Is not putting weight on a leg
- Shows signs of laminitis
- Cannot get up
- Has a very high temperature or respiration rate
- Is suffering from colic
- Is choking
- Is having issues foaling



When in doubt or if you're inexperienced, it's always best to consult your vet, even for minor wounds. Your horse's health and safety are paramount!