

WHAT IS TPR AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT

Temperature, Pulse and Respiration for Horses



Temperature, Pulse and Respiration (TPR) are basic measurements an owner can use to monitor the vital signs of their horse. Using one or all of these indicators allows you to measure how your horse is feeling and how it recovers from exercise and stress.

It is important to take your horse's TPR at various times and intervals initially to determine what is normal for your horse. Then stick to the same time each day if you require a temperature log.

Each individual horse can have a different resting heart rate so knowing normal for your horse is very valuable if your horse is unwell.

Remember that it is normal for your horses TPR to rise during and immediately after exercise, but should return to normal fairly quickly.

Temperature

Veterinary thermometers are relatively inexpensive and easy to locate. You can find them at a good saddlery, pet store or online.

Use a small amount of petroleum jelly or lubricant to apply a layer on the bottom half of the thermometer. Stand close to the side of your horses hindquarter, to avoid the chance of being kicked. Carefully lift the horses tail out of the way, giving the horse a gentle scratch just beside the anus or touch the rectum to let the horse know you are there then, very gently insert the thermometer into the horse's rectum. Hold the thermometer so that it is gently pushing up against the rectal wall for further accuracy. Do not use force at any stage.

Hold the thermometer securely to prevent it from moving (too far in or falling out). Leave the thermometer in place until the signal sounds (digital models) or 2-3 minutes (mercury thermometers).

Remove the thermometer and read the temperature.

Pulse (Heart Rate)

Pulse rate can be a very useful training indicator as well and can be utilised to assess how quickly your horse recovers to resting heart rate.

Before taking your horse's pulse, have a stopwatch or your phone timer handy so you can keep track of time while counting heartbeats. Set your timer or stopwatch for 30 seconds. If you have a stethoscope, you can use this to listen for your horses heart rate. Stand on your horses left side and place the stethoscope on the horses chest, tucked just under the elbow. Count the number of full beats for 30 seconds, then multiply the number by 2.

If you do not have a stethoscope, the easiest way to feel a horses pulse is to place your fingers (not thumbs) under the horses jawbone, toward the neck and under the cheek (see photo). You should be able to feel the large artery under the skin (exact placement will vary from horse to horse, take your time and be patient until you locate the vein).

Apply gentle pressure so that you can feel the pulsation of the blood within the artery. Once you have located the pulse, start the stopwatch.

Count the pulse for 30 seconds, then multiply the number you got by 2 to estimate the total beats per minute.



Respiration

This is easiest with your timer on your phone so you can keep track of time while counting breaths. Set a 30 second timer. Stand to the side of your horse, a few feet away, and watch the ribcage as the horse inhales and exhales. Count how many times the horse takes a breath in 30 seconds. double this number and you have the total number of breaths per minute.

Alternatively, hold your hand close to your horses nostril (the horse may sniff you at first, so wait until normal breathing resumes), then begin counting breaths.

The average respiration rate for an adult horses is 8-15 breaths per minute (bpm). This however, is only a guide and can vary depending on variants such as age and size (a small pony, such as a Sheltand, would naturally have a higher resting respiratory rate than a large horse, such as a Warmblood).

WHY TAKE TPR

Taking your horses TPR can provide valuable information as to the well-being and health of your horse.

WHAT IS NORMAL TPR

The average temperature for horses is 37.5°C to 38.5°C.

The average respiration rate for horses is 8-20bpm (breaths per minute).

The average pulse (heart rate) for horses is 36-40 bmp (beats per minute).