

## When to Call the Vet

Excerpted from an article by Roberta Dwyer, DVM, MS

There is no way to make an entire list of situations of "when to call the veterinarian" in this short space. However, here are some general guidelines.

The presence of uncontrollable bleeding, foreign objects protruding from the body (do not remove them!), lacerations, injury to the eye or eyelids, abdominal pain or diarrhea, aggressive or unusual behavior, neurologic signs, severe or chronic lameness, mares which are actively in labor for more than 20 minutes without progress, and difficulty in breathing are only some of the obvious times to call your veterinarian. Perhaps the best rule is, when in doubt, call!

All horse owners should know how to take their horse's temperature, pulse, respiratory rate, capillary refill time, and dehydration status. When these basic health parameters are abnormal for an unknown reason, a call to the veterinarian is warranted. When you have observed your animals over a period of time, you should promptly know when something is out of the ordinary!

Multiple animals getting sick at once should raise a red flag. Clinical signs in several animals could indicate such dangers as infectious diseases or a toxin in the horses' pasture, water, or feed. This warrants an immediate call to the veterinarian.

A good rule of thumb is, if a child were exhibiting the same symptoms as your horse, would you call the pediatrician? If your child had profuse diarrhea, chances are you're not going to let him/her go untreated for a week without seeking a medical opinion. Proper treatment and diagnosis of a sick horse requires a veterinarian/patient interaction.

Part of our training to become veterinary practitioners is to check multiple organ systems, as many diseases have complicated clinical signs. Someone who has a horse with abnormal behavior might not notice or report on an Internet chat room that the horse has a yellowish color to its gums. A veterinarian finding this in a physical examination would likely lead to blood work to evaluate the condition of the liver. Liver disease can cause the build-up of substances in the bloodstream causing abnormal behavior.

The Internet is a wonderful tool, but readers must remain critical in their reading, and not believe everything in print. Consider the source. Information made available through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)), the American Association of Equine Practitioners ([www.aaep.com](http://www.aaep.com)), and many other sites are closely scrutinized for accuracy. If your veterinarian diagnoses Cushing's disease in your horse, and you want to read more information on the disease, do a search at [www.aaep.org/](http://www.aaep.org/) or [www.thehorse.com](http://www.thehorse.com). Remember, though, that this is general information on the disease, and not advice on how to treat your specific horse being fed your feed, drinking your creek water, etc. Those decisions need to be discussed with a veterinarian who knows your horse's situation.

When a diagnosis and treatment plan have been made by your veterinarian, then do some research on the disease and treatments. Reliable information can help owners make intelligent decisions regarding their animals. However, taking medical advice from a total stranger, as in a discussion group, is not advisable.

The saying often fits, "You get what you pay for."