

# Traveling with Your Horse: First-Aid Kits

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While some people may say that horses will get into trouble at every chance they get, it is more likely that horses will react to any situation based on their fight-or-flight responses. Instead of quietly lying down and waiting for help like other herbivores might, they panic more easily and may get themselves in deeper trouble. Of course, there are horses that are accident-prone, and no matter how clean and free of debris their environment is (including pastures, stalls, and barns), they still manage to injure themselves.

Because we cannot remove every source of danger from a horse's environment, it is important that horse owners are always prepared to care for an injured horse until a veterinarian arrives. To ensure you are ready to care for your horse, you will need a well-stocked equine first-aid kit.

At home, especially if your horse lives in your backyard, you can keep first-aid supplies in an easily accessible cabinet (Figures 1 and 2). However, if you board your horse or if you transport your horse by trailer off your property, it is imperative that you have first-aid supplies in one, easy-to-access location, like a toolbox, plastic container, or fishing-tackle box. However, regardless of where you keep your supplies, they need to be organized well, stored in a clean area (preferably temperature controlled), and checked regularly for expiration (Figure 3).

This publication lists equipment, medications, and bandages that are important to have handy in case of an emergency.



**Figure 1.** Cabinet of equine first-aid supplies. Photo courtesy of Sarah Coleman

## Equipment

- Flashlight (with working batteries) to effectively care for your horse on a dark night or in a dimly lit barn or stall
- Rectal thermometer
- Stethoscope to check heart rate and listen to gut sounds
- Procedural (latex or other material) gloves to use when cleaning wounds. Gloves prevent wound and medication contamination, and they keep your hands clean.
- Duct tape
- Bandage scissors (scissors with rounded ends) to safely remove wraps (Figure 4)
- Wire cutters to free a horse from a fence. (Wire cutters are more important if the horse's pasture has wire fencing.)
- Sharp pocketknife to cut loose a horse that is tangled in a lead or crossies, or one that has a foot stuck in a hay net
- Instant cold pack to reduce swelling from an injury. Instant cold packs are especially handy when cold hosing is not available. (If your horse lives at home, you can buy an ice wrap or boot designed for horses and keep it in your freezer.)
- Clean bucket to soak hooves or wash a wound
- Clean towels to use for wound compression or to spread out as a sanitary field for small items
- Twitch to restrain a horse. If you expect to be working by yourself, use a one-man twitch.
- Chain shank, extra lead rope and extra halter. When traveling, it is imperative to take an extra halter and lead rope inside the truck, in addition to those in the trailer. This extra set will increase your odds of helping your horse if the trailer flips and obstructs access to the tack room, where people generally carry extra halters and lead ropes.
- 60-cc (cubic centimeter) dose syringes with catheter tips for administering oral medications or flushing wounds (Figure 5)



**Figure 2.** First-aid supplies, including syringes, bandages, elastic tape, and exam gloves, should be kept together in an easy-to-access location. Photo courtesy of Fernanda Camargo



**Figure 3.** A well-organized and well-stocked first-aid kit allows a horse owner to render aid without delay. Photo courtesy of Sarah Coleman



**Figure 4.** Bandage scissors. Photos courtesy of Fernanda Camargo

## Wound Treatments: Disinfectants and Topical Medications

Before applying anything (including disinfectants, creams, or ointments) to a fresh, open wound, consult with your vet, as some products will make it hard for the vet to see the wound; it could also prevent the wound from being sutured or stapled, causing a delay in healing.

A well-equipped equine first-aid kit should be stocked with multiple wound-treatment supplies:

- Antiseptic solution such as Betadine (povidone iodine) or Nolvasan (chlorhexidine) for washing and disinfecting wounds. It is important to dilute these products before using them on open wounds.
- Hydrogen peroxide, which is especially important for puncture wounds
- Wound cream or spray, such as silver sulfadiazine cream, triple antibiotic ointment, vetericyc, manuka honey, silver spray, or any other topical product you prefer, as long as it does not delay healing (Ichthammol and nitrofurazone should not be applied to open wounds.)
- Ten-ounce bottle of saline solution (a bottle of contact lens solution with a nozzle works well) for flushing hard-to-reach or delicate wounds, such as near an eye

## Medications

Before we delve into medications to keep in your first-aid kit, it is important to note that most medications need a veterinary prescription before they can be dispensed. Depending on the relationship you have with your vet, some medications may be dispensed for you to always have in case of emergencies. However, even if you are comfortable administering medications, always consult with your vet first. If they can get to your horse quickly, they may not want you to administer anything, so they will have a clearer perspective on the extent of the issue. If you have a show horse, there may also be competition rules that relate to the use of medications, of which your veterinarian will be aware.

- Phenylbutazone (often called “bute”) and flunixin meglumine (commonly referred to by the brand name “Banamine”) are nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and pain relievers. Both are available as an oral paste in premeasured doses, and phenylbutazone is also available as tablets. Confer with your vet to get the correct dosage for the injury.
- Dormosedan gel is a mild standing sedative that is given sublingually (under the tongue). Check the instructions for the correct dosage and wear gloves, as humans can absorb the drug through the skin.
- Eye ointment



**Figure 5.** Syringe. Photo courtesy of Fernanda Camargo



**Figure 6.** Useful bandaging materials for horses include swim diapers, elastic wraps, self-sticking bandages, poultice pads, and duct tape. Photo courtesy of Fernanda Camargo



**Figure 7.** Combine cotton. Photos courtesy of Fernanda Camargo

## Bandages

Once a wound is cleaned, you will need various bandaging materials to cover it and keep it clean. You will also want bandages on hand to get the bleeding under control, depending on severity, and to stop the bleeding quickly before cleaning. An equine first-aid kit should include multiple bandaging options (Figure 6):

- Box of four-inch square gauze pads to clean and cover small wounds
- Rolls of self-sticking bandages (such as Vetrap)
- Rolls of strong, elastic cloth tape with rubber-based adhesive (such as Elastikon)
- One or two rolls of combine cotton, which can be used as padding under a wrap or as a pressure pad to stop bleeding (Figure 7). Regular cotton should not be applied directly to an injury, because it will stick and leave fibers in the wound. You can also use clean rags or towels to stop bleeding.
- A clean set of pillow wraps and bandages for creating an outer protective and supportive wrap over an already bandaged wound. When used in conjunction with a poultice, this kind of wrap can also be used to reduce heat and inflammation in a leg.
- Shaped, ready-to-use poultice pads (such as Animalintex) for use on a horse's hoof
- Disposable diapers or swim diapers (such as Little Swimmers), which can be useful for wrapping a foot. (Disposable swimming diapers do not absorb liquid like regular diapers do.)

One hopes that half the items in a first-aid kit will never be needed, but preparation is key when the need arises to take care of your horse to the best of your ability until the vet arrives.

### Publications in this series:

[Traveling with Your Horse: Caring for Your Horse Away from Home \(ASC-251\)](#)

[Traveling with Your Horse: Trailer and Truck Packing \(ASC-252\)](#)

[Traveling with Your Horse: First-Aid Kits \(ASC-253\)](#)

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Issued 01-2023