

SOP No: ATT 024

SUBJECT: Clinical assessment of horses

POLICY: Two people if working in the open, one person if the horse is restrained in a crush.

Demonstrator: Operators should be familiar with the correct techniques and the anatomy of horses before attempting this procedure.

Students: Procedures should be clearly demonstrated before student attempts them. Students should be aware of the requirements for aseptic technique.

PRECAUTIONS: Sturdy footwear

Wash hands and exposed body parts thoroughly with soap and water after handling horses.

EQUIPMENT: veterinary lubricant
Thermometer
Stethoscope
Water
Halter
Crush or yards

PROCEDURE:

1. Begin with an observation of the animal's environment and condition from a distance.
2. Visually observe respiratory rate (younger horses will have a higher rate).
3. Take rectal temperature.
 - The animal should be secured with a halter and held at the head by the handler unless it is confined in a crush.
 - Approach the horse from the left side at the shoulder and stand as close to its body as possible. Work slowly towards the rear of the horse continually rubbing the horse so it is aware of your position. Raise the tail. Do not stand directly behind the horse as it may kick.
 - Slowly insert a lubricated thermometer into rectum. Ensure the thermometer is inserted at least 5 - 7 cms. Leave thermometer inserted for at least 30 seconds if it is a mercury thermometer or until the thermometer beeps if it is a digital thermometer.
 - Remove thermometer carefully and move directly back to the horse's shoulder
 - Normal resting rectal temperature is 37°C to 38.5°C

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4. Heart rate is determined by either auscultation of the heart with a stethoscope or by obtaining a pulse from the facial artery where it curves over the vascular impression of the body of the mandible. To auscultate the heart the operator must place the stethoscope on the chest wall inside and cranial to the point of the elbow. The heart is more easily heard on the left side than the right side of the chest.
5. The pulse should be palpated at the facial artery and assessed for intensity as well as rate.
6. Mucous membranes are assessed by looking at the gums or the conjunctiva of the eye. The operator stands at the side of the horse and gently opens the lips and assesses gum colour. Digital pressure is then applied to the gum and the length of time taken for the gum to return to its original colour is determined. When assessing the ocular conjunctiva the operator stands to the side of the horse and gently everts the upper eyelid by applying upward pressure to the outside of the lid with the thumb to expose the palpebral conjunctiva.
7. Assess gastrointestinal sounds. This is done by auscultation with a stethoscope. The operator approaches the horse as he/she does when taking the horse's temperature. The stethoscope is placed over the different areas of the abdomen and gut sounds are assessed on both the left and right sides.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

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REVISED:

REFERENCES

1. McCurnin, D. M. & Bassert, J.M. 2006, Clinical textbook for veterinary technicians. Elsevier Saunders, 631, 921.