

First Aid Necessities

"Be Prepared," good advice for Boy Scouts and even better advice for horse owners. An essential part of being a well-prepared horse owner is having a well thought out First Aid kit. After all, horses are active beings and accidents are bound to happen. A complete First Aid kit will ensure that you have necessary items close at hand, without your having to scramble around to find what you need. So what, you might ask, constitutes a quality First Aid kit?

Well, to start, the kit should be housed in an air-tight container that will keep out moisture and dirt. A plastic food container of the appropriate size and shape works best. Also, plastic zipper bags are excellent for keeping small items clean and easily locatable. As for the contents, below is a list of basic first aid supplies that will be useful in cases of injury.

•Disinfectant:

For cleaning wounds. When necessary, dilute with clean water, per manufacturer's guidelines. Apply to wound using cotton or gauze, always wiping from the center of the wound out towards the surrounding skin.

•Antiseptic Swabs and Scrubs:

These allow the wound to be cleaned even without access to a water supply.

•Wound Powder / Ointment:

To prevent new infection from entering the wound. Ointments have some water resistance but are less easily absorbed than creams. Powders avoid the need to touch a wound, but are only absorbed by broken skin. After cleaning, no preparation should be used on a wound that has yet to be seen by your veterinarian.

•Antibiotic Aerosol:

For treatment of wounds to prevent infection without damaging tissue. Often colored to help with targeting. Always spray gently from the recommended distance.

•Fly Repellent:

To keep insects away from healing wounds.

•Wound Dressings:

To cover wounds without sticking to them and to promote healing. They come pre-packed for sterility.

•Bandages:

At minimum, you should have two. They should be 3 to 4 inches wide and stretchy. Vetrap™ is a good choice because it sticks to itself and not to the horse. Any bandage should be applied over either cotton wool, a padded leg wrap, or field wrap. They should be carefully applied to prevent pressure points. Avoid open-weave or felt bandages with no give.

•Band-aids / Insulating Tape / Safety Pins:

For fastening bandages.

•Field Wrap:

Cotton wool sandwiched between two layers of gauze. Sold in rolls. Use for padding beneath bandages or as a pressure pad to stop bleeding. You can get this from your vet, or from equine supply stores.

•Cotton Wool:

Keep several large rolls on hand. Useful for cleaning wounds, mopping up, and dabbing on powders. Not suitable for applying dry directly to wounds as it will stick.

•Epsom Salts:

For soaking abscessed feet.

•Tweezers:

To remove splinters.

•Thermometer:

Attach a string with a clip and make sure you don't lose the thermometer by attaching it to the horse's tail.

•Vaseline / Petroleum Jelly:

To help insert the thermometer. Also protects soft tissues from soreness and chafing.

Remember to keep your kit in a convenient place. You might want to put together more than one kit – maybe one for the barn, one for the trailer, and a small one to take on the trail. Use a permanent marker to write your veterinarian's phone number on all of your kits.

First aid kits are intended only for immediate, emergency action or for dealing with minor wounds. They are not for dealing with major injuries or illness. When in doubt, call your veterinarian.

–Sarah Gee