



# The Equine Veterinarian

Students will explore the work of equine veterinarians as they conduct a routine exam and address more serious health issues through analysis and consultation.



Engage!

Give a short tour of the stables. Meet a staff person and an equine educator along the way. Discuss why it is important that horse owners know how to take the vitals signs of their animals.

Act as the handler at the horse's head while the staff person explains TPR(Temperature, Pulse, Respiration) and demonstrates how to monitor each.

Describe the normal temperature ranges for an adult horse as between 99°F and 101°F. Explain where to locate the heart, facial artery, and digital arteries in the legs, and how to observe how the horse breathes by watching its flank and nostril flare. What are some of the symptoms of illness the horse owner should be aware of? When is it necessary to call the equine veterinarian?

Now is a good time for a little story telling! All horse owners have a medical tale to tell! How is an equine veterinarian different than a small animal vet?



Explore!

When an equine veterinarian visits the stable, the doctor's office comes to the farm! Introduce 8" x 11" pictures of a dozen items used by the vet when working with horses. These could be pictures of digital radiography equipment, a microscope, diagnostic ultrasound, endoscopy (bronchoscope/gastroscope), thermography camera, surgical tools, laptop, and even the truck! Your veterinary practice will gladly let you take pictures of equipment they carry and provide information on how the items are used. Include a picture of your veterinarian and the staff of the practice as well!

Describe five common illnesses or injuries that require the services of an equine veterinarian. With each description, ask the students what medical tools and equipment from the picture collection might be used to diagnose the problem.

Invite students to examine the horse's legs, flank, neck, and face to discover the thickness and length of bones, the beating heart, eyes, ears, breathing, the differences between muscles, ligaments, and tendons. How are these different from their own? Ask the staff person to help students find the horse's pulse and calculate BPM. Compare to their own.

## Explain

Once a diagnosis has been made, an equine veterinarian will prescribe treatment that can include medication, therapy, rest, and/or surgery. If a horse must be transported to a surgical and therapy center, special attention must be given to managing pain, stabilizing the horse in transit, and keeping the animal calm.

Direct students to a horse trailer. Walk inside and explain how horses are transported for trail rides, events, and races. With students safely away from the trailer, ask the staff person to demonstrate with your equine educator horse how an animal is loaded and secured, then safely unloaded.

Ask students what modifications to the trailer could be made for the transport of sick or injured horses? Accept all answers. Describe your own experience of transporting an injured horse. Describe how the equine veterinarian would transport an ill or injured horse.



High performance horses receive sports medicine care from equine veterinarians who specialize in the needs of equine athletes.

Photo Credit: Gina Maybee



The best path to good horse health involves a dedicated owner, caring stable and veterinary staff, and responsible riders. Invite students to become part of a horse health team for the day!

Divide students into groups of three or four. Introduce a volunteer or staff person to each group and assign each group a horse to care for. You will have pre-selected the horses/ponies for this activity that are calm and kid-friendly. With their staff leader, walk out to meet their horse. Carry a bag or bucket with brushes, hoof pick, and any other small items needed for grooming and care. Spend some time caring for their horse from head to hoof.

Staff leaders can take their groups into stables and feed rooms. Have students help mix and measure feed for their horse. Examine a health chart and see that their horse is up-to-date on shots, exams, de-worming, and hoof care. Discuss with students the kinds of professionals who assist with horse health, especially the equine veterinarians and farrier! Make note that these are careers to consider!



Gather all students together to evaluate their horse health experience. What are the responsibilities we have to horses? Review the day's experiences and consider every aspect of housing and caring for a horse. What careers stem from equine ownership and care?

Poll students to see who might be interested in learning more about equine health careers. Have information available to share with students on local 4H clubs, pony clubs, vet tech and pre-tech programs in local high schools and community colleges, as well as university programs. Bundle program brochures and flyers with your Horse Discovery Center information for students to take home. Offer to be a resource for students and teachers. Promote your volunteer opportunities.