

VITAL INFORMATION

- Take and record TPR.*

OBJECTIVE: In Yellow Level, your students learned about equine vital signs, including the normal ranges for a horse's temperature, pulse and respiration. Now they should be able to **take and record vital signs independently** - giving you confidence in their ability to assess a horse's condition, especially in a crisis.

At HorseSense, we try to teach our students the whys and hows of taking TPR in Yellow Level and encourage them to practice until they can perform the job quickly and confidently. We also like to have students record their horse's resting rates as part of designing a conditioning schedule or filling out a record book. Throughout these projects, frequently **review the student's understanding of normal ranges**, as well as the **potential ailments and emergencies** that can cause an elevated temperature, pulse or respiration.



CHECKING IT OFF: Taking TPR often requires plenty of practice - particularly taking and recording the pulse. Not all horses have a pulse that is easy to locate, so encourage students to practice finding and counting the pulse in as many different horses as possible. This can be done during pre-ride grooming as well as after a ride, when the pulse may still be elevated and easier to feel.

Give students a refresher lesson on taking all the vital signs and assign them the job of determining their own horse's "normal." You can also devote an entire rainy day lesson or camp session to TPR if you have enough quiet horses to visit.

You'll know they've got it: if they can confidently and accurately determine a horse's resting temperature, pulse and respiration, as well as measure to determine height and weight. They should be able to locate pulse using the facial artery even if a stethoscope is used, and record all numbers legibly, using common abbreviations.

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:

"What are some situations where you might need to take a horse's pulse?"

"How would you know if your horse had a fever?"

"You keep trying to take your horse's pulse and respiration, but he won't stand still for a full minute. How can you solve this problem?"

"Why do you think it is important to know how much your horse weighs?"



THIS SKILL
COULD
SAVE YOUR
HORSE'S LIFE!

BY THE NUMBERS

It doesn't matter how quickly your students can find a pulse if they don't know a horse's normal TPR ranges. We find that students often have a hard time getting these numbers to stick in their brain. Even if they've earned their **Yellow Level** checkmark for discussing TPR ranges, review this knowledge frequently to ensure they've really got it! If your students are still a bit fuzzy on what actually counts as a fever, or get pulse and respiration numbers confused, check out the **Teaching Guide for Yellow HorseSense: Should I Call the Vet?** for a few strategies, including:

- 🐾 **Writing the numbers somewhere visible**, such as on a giant whiteboard in the barn aisle. Create matching games and fill-in-the-blanks, and use different colors and lettering to make the information memorable.
- 🐾 **Find the odd one out.** Write a handful of heart rates or temperatures on the whiteboard and ask students to circle the one that isn't normal. Change the numbers every day.
- 🐾 **Make casual conversation.** Ask students if they think a hypothetical TPR reading is normal while they groom, warm up or clean tack.

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99 12 60 36 20

T, P or R?

FINGER ON THE PULSE

Taking a horse's temperature *sounds* unpleasantly difficult, but experienced equestrians know that taking an accurate pulse rate without a stethoscope is actually the hardest part of the job. Over the years, we've had a few students that simply could not locate a pulse - and realized that many times, these same students had a hard time finding their own pulse as well.

Ask students to practice locating their own pulse, recording their heart rate "at rest" and after exercise. Once they can use their fingertips to do this reliably, you can **teach recovery rate** in the same way: have students record their pulse while resting, immediately after strenuous exercise, and then again after five minutes of walking.

When it comes time to practice on a real horse, try to choose a relatively thin-skinned, quiet horse at rest. Apply fly spray if needed, and make sure everyone's pockets have been emptied of treats, or the horse's head is unlikely to remain still for long!



PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Finding and recording a horse's vital signs can be challenging at first. This means your students will probably not be confident in their ability to do it until they get a **lot** of practice.

At HorseSense, we like to provide this practice time in three different ways:

RAIN DELAY RECORDING

Stuck in the barn aisle waiting out a pop-up thunderstorm? **Use the opportunity for a TPR demonstration** with a little help from a patient lesson horse. Review your students' knowledge by asking them to **guess the horse's resting temperature, pulse and respiration rates** - who can come closest to the correct answer?

Allow students to **work together to take pulse and respiration on the remaining horses**, with one student acting as designated timekeeper. Be available to help locate a pulse on any horse that is accused of being dead! If time allows, you can finish by taking temperature. Horses should be securely held or tied for this, well away from other horses. Make sure you have alcohol to disinfect your thermometer between horses and hand sanitizer for any students that hold it.



FILL IN THE BLANKS

Assign students the job of **creating a stall card for each school horse**. These infosheets can be posted outside each horse's stall or saddle rack, or provided for students to take to overnight horse shows. Each stall card should include the horse's resting temperature, pulse and respiration along with identification photos and emergency contact numbers.

This project makes a great team activity for camps or clinics. Allow students to work in pairs and provide a stethoscope for anyone that tries and fails to find a pulse.

LLPro member? You can download our stall card template at:

<https://horsesenselearninglevels.com/resource/stall-cards-set-all-levels/>

HOST A TPR PARTY

Once a year, right after school lets out for the summer, we invite all our working students and "barn rats" to come spend a full day at the barn - preferably a day without lessons on the schedule. The agenda? **Give every horse on the farm a makeover**, complete with bubble baths, and **take updated identification photos and resting vital signs**.

Provide a dry erase board with a chart to record vital signs, along with shampoo, mane pulling combs, clippers, etc. Not only will your students get plenty of repetitive practice, but they'll enjoy the camaraderie and the instant gratification of beautifying the horses. As a bonus, you'll have tidy horses and fresh TPR numbers for all, without having to do any of the work! Encourage students to take **before** photos as well as **after**, and **show off their good work in your barn's newsletter and social media page**.



FIT FOR THE WORK

Once your students are capable of recording both pulse and respiration independently, put the skill to use by evaluating the recovery rates of your horses at work. This is a great exercise for a couple of reasons:

1. **It highlights the dramatic difference between a horse's vitals at work and at rest.** Students are often astonished to discover how much a horse's heart rate and respiration rate can rise.
2. **It teaches students to evaluate their horse's condition** and determine appropriate work - an essential skill for anyone riding and training on their own.
3. **It demands quick location of the horse's pulse**, even if the horse is not completely still. This can be a difficult skill to master!

Ask students to finish a ride with a long trot or canter, and dismount immediately after returning to the walk. **Have them record pulse and respiration, walk the horse in hand for five minutes, and then take vitals again.** Repeat after ten minutes of walking and discuss the results. Did all horses return to normal? How quickly? How might factors such as deep footing, steep terrain or heat and humidity affect the horse's recovery rate?



Are there eventing competitions or endurance rides in your area? If so, encourage students to take their new skills on the road. Volunteering at equestrian events is always a worthwhile experience no matter where you work, but your students can gain extra knowledge by assisting at mandatory vet checks.

THE BIG PICTURE

Although vital signs are an important indicator of horse health and condition, they aren't the only information we should be paying attention to. As often as possible, draw attention to other signs of a thriving horse, and signs of one that might be under the weather. What would prompt you to take a horse's vitals in the first place?

-  **Listen to gut sounds.** How many gurgles can they hear? Does it sound different on the left side versus the right? How much activity is normal? This can be practiced during pre-ride grooming, before the horses get sweaty and sticky.
-  **Evaluate hydration.** Where should the pinch test take place? How many seconds should capillary refill take? Practice both routinely, before and after work.
-  **What else can the gums tell us?** Consider making a color chart to share with students, showing the difference between healthy pink, pale, and toxic red or purple.
-  **Read the horse's expression.** Teach your students how to identify worry lines and indicators of a horse that is withdrawn. Many riders do not know the signs of an "equine pain face." **If your students learn only one thing, it should be to recognize a horse that is silently suffering.** This can prevent a lot of pain and frustration!

