Horses get injured. They run into things, they tangle with each other in paddocks and pastures and they seem to get hurt on their own even when they live in what looks like a perfectly safe environment.

Wounds can include:

- an abrasion or scrape that does not penetrate the entire skin thickness
- punctures that enter through the skin and penetrate the underlying muscle, tendons/ligaments, or organs
- full thickness lacerations of the skin

Horses are quite sensitive to the disease tetanus. Be sure to check the tetanus vaccination status of any horse with an injury. While puncture wounds are the ideal environment for the growth of the tetanus organism, it is best to play it safe and follow your veterinarian’s advice on tetanus protection.

Lacerations should be examined by your veterinarian to determine if suturing is beneficial. Call your veterinarian immediately if the wound invades:

- the eye
- any joint
- tendon or ligament
- chest or abdominal cavity
The horse has its own marvelous mechanism for healing wounds. Both owners and veterinarians want to enhance the horse’s ability to heal the injury. Many horse owners have a cabinet full of various treatments and dressings for their horse.

These recommendations are drawn from an article presented by at the American Association of Equine Practitioners conference in December 2015, by Colorado State University’s Dean Hendrickson, DVM, MS, Dipl. ACVS. [What You Should and Should Not Put In or On a Wound](#)

If you chose to manage the wound on your own, consider the following regarding cleansing and topical wound therapies.

**Cleaning the wound**

Wounds in the horse are often contaminated with bedding, hay and other foreign materials. Removing this debris, dead tissue and reducing the number of bacteria that may have contaminated the wound generally result in better healing. Aggressive use of pressure by scrubbing the wound or forcing wound cleaners into an injury under force (think hose or Waterpik®) should be avoided. The healthy tissue, which will support the repair, may be damaged by such techniques.

- Remember that the act of cleaning a wound can cause some degree of tissue damage, regardless of the cleaning agent and the method of cleaning.
- Isotonic Saline available at your local drug store has been shown to be a very effective cleaning agent. You can often find it labeled as a wound wash.
- Research has failed to prove that utilizing tamed iodine, Betadine ® or chlorhexidine, Nolvasan ® in cleansing injuries results in significantly less bacteria in a wound than using saline alone.
Topical Wound treatments

Gone are the days of strong iodine and bag balm as wound treatments. Research projects are looking into the effectiveness of vinegar and honey but no need to raid the pantry; we have effective treatments on the shelf in our local drug store.

If you have an injury that you would like to manage on your own,

- Nitrofurazone, (the yellow stuff) should not be used in open wounds. It slows the healing rate. It may be useful on abrasions that do not penetrate the skin.
- Topical Silver—SSD—Silver Sulfadiazine cream has been shown to be an effective wound treatment on open wounds.
- Triple antibiotic—polymixin B, bacitracin and neomycin work together to reduce bacteria within a wound. Readily available as a cream or ointment, keep this in your first aid kit.

Gently cleaning the wound, keeping the area clean and applying a suitable wound treatment can facilitate healing and get your horse quickly back to normal.