

# The Vet Box

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(Information compiled from my experience running the vet box at USPC rallies, from articles concerning cooling out the overheated horse, and from the USPC Rulebook on Eventing)

**USPC Rulebook:** “Following completion of the Cross Country course, the rider will proceed to the vet box immediately after pulling up and report to the HM Judge or the veterinarian. Competitors will be assigned 10 HM penalty points if they do not check in immediately after crossing the finish line. Riders eliminated, disqualified, or who retire on the course must also report to the vet box.”

## The veterinarian may (depending on the horse’s apparent condition):

1. Make a clinical evaluation of the mount’s condition.
2. Take the temperature.
3. Take the pulse.
4. Take the respiratory rate.

After the veterinarian has finished with the mount and given any needed directions, the competitor or a teammate may begin cool out procedures.

The veterinarian makes at least one more check (usually within 10-15 minutes) before permitting the mount to return to the stable for final cool out.

## Penalty points:

1. Improper pulling up after the finish (like galloping up to the Vet Box and NOT gradually coming to a walk) – up to 15 points
2. Improper cooling out – up to 20 points
3. Distressed mount – up to 15 points (This mount MAY be eliminated and/or disqualified from that phase as well as the remainder of the rally.)

## When you come off the Cross Country course:

1. Gradually come to a walk.
2. Report immediately to the veterinarian or the HM Judge. This allows the veterinarian and the HM Judge to keep accurate track of the mounts as they come off the course.
3. Run up your stirrups.
4. Stand at the head of, but not in front of, the mount and allow the veterinarian to evaluate your horse. At this time, the competitor should stand quietly, be attentive, answer any questions asked, and observe the veterinarian.
5. WITH YOUR TEAM’S HORSE MANAGER OR WITH A TEAMMATE, attend to your horse’s primary needs and check for any injuries or distress. Loosen the noseband and loosen the girth. Check for cuts, abrasions, loose or pulled shoes, etc. If you find anything, ask for assistance from the HM Judge or the veterinarian.
6. Remove tack as efficiently as possible, depending on available help. If the horse is really hot, take off the saddle and pad and start sponging and scraping and change out the bridle for a halter later. It helps if the Horse Manager has previously found a dry and out-of-the-way place to store his or her teammates’ tack until it can be carried back to the barn.
7. Cooling out should be done appropriately according to the mount’s condition and the heat and humidity. If it is hot and/or humid, sponge the mount and scrape all over, to remove sweat and lather. This encourages heat loss through evaporation.
8. While cooling out, walk in a large circle and keep at a safe distance from others and watch out for horses coming off the cross-country course. Do not walk near the veterinarian and HM Judge, since they will be evaluating horses as they come off the course.

9. Gradually offer water to your mount as it is walked. Continue walking and scraping. Cover the mount appropriately if it is cold and/or windy (cooler, sheet, etc.), but remember that covering the horse (even with wet towels) will impair heat loss and delay cooling out.
10. Report to the veterinarian when requested for at least one more check, usually in 10-15 minutes. Continue reporting to the vet as instructed until excused to go back to the barn and prepare for turnback.

### **What should the Horse Manager bring to the Vet Box area?**

Have these things available and set up BEFORE your first competitor comes off the Cross Country course!

1. Halters for the horses on your team
2. A tarp or blanket (preferably something waterproof) on which to place the tack until it can be carried back to the barn, after your last competitor comes off the Cross Country course. Put your equipment AWAY from the area where the horses come off course and away from the Vet Box per se, so that your team's tack does not get stepped on!
3. Sweat scrapers
4. Sponges
5. Small buckets for water so the horses can drink and larger buckets to fill your sponge buckets from the community large bucket

### **Cooling Overheated Horses**

What is a hot environment for a horse? More than 80 degrees Fahrenheit . . .

What is the temperature of a horse that is too hot? Above 104 degrees Fahrenheit . . .

### **There are some basic things you can do to make sure that your horse does not overheat after exercise:**

1. Your horse should be fit for the exercise asked of him.
2. If your horse is fit and if you have been exercising him on a regular basis as spring progresses into summer and as the temperatures have gradually risen, then you probably have acclimated him for the heat and for the environment in which he will be working.
3. If you are going to an area that is hotter than where you live (not a problem for us in Texas), consider arriving early enough to train for a bit in the new place to acclimate the horse.
4. Remember that a horse that has just shipped for a long distance may be dehydrated and may have lost electrolytes during the trip--and therefore may suffer more heat stress. Make sure you supplement with electrolytes both before and after the trip, and make sure that he has a salt block.
5. You should DEFINITELY know what your horse's normal temperature is, before and after regular exercise!

### **What do you need to cool out a really hot horse? (as in one coming off Cross Country at a July schooling show)**

Large buckets to hold 10-12 gallons of water and a large amount of ice

Supply of more water close by, such as a hose or tank

Small buckets (1-2 gallons) so the horse can drink

An assistant to hold the horse and one person to sponge and scrape each side of the horse

A shady spot to carry out the cooling

If your horse is truly overheated, put him in the shade, give him a bath, sponge him down, scrape off the excess water, walk him, sponge him again, scrape, walk, sponge, scrape, walk, sponge, scrape, etc. The walking promotes blood flow to the skin and cooling by convection, while the movement of air aids cooling by evaporation. Do this until he is cool and his temperature is 101 degrees or less.

Do NOT place bags of ice against his skin since this reduces cooling by stopping skin blood flow to the area under the pack.

### **Signs that a horse is in heat distress:**

1. The horse seems tired or unwilling to go on.
2. His heart rate will be high, more than 60 beats per minute, or even as high as 80 if he is really in distress.
3. He will be blowing hard, more than 50 breaths per minute.
4. His body will be covered by a road map of bulging veins.
5. His gums will be a darker pink than normal, or even maroon if he is really having problems.

6. He will be standing without showing any interest in grazing or in what is going on around him.
7. His heart rate should always be higher than his respiratory rate. If his respiratory rate is higher than his heart rate, he is “inverted,” and this signals a real problem!

If you see any of these signs of heat distress, STOP exercising your horse and begin cooling him immediately. If your horse does not cool out completely in one hour, call a veterinarian.