

Horses – Basic Care

- Horses are social animals. They seek out other horses, other companion animals (such as goats) or a familiar barn environment.
- When housed in a group, horses establish a pecking order which may influence group feeding and housing arrangements. An older female usually dominates the group, except in breeding season when a stallion is present.
- Respond best when approached in a quiet and gentle manner. Speak to the horse to alert it of your presence.
- Unable to see objects directly in front of them, they should be approached from a 45° angle off either shoulder.
- Enrichment should be provided unless specified in protocol and approved by the IACUC.
- Examples of enrichment:
 - Food treats
 - Hay
 - Jolly balls
- Minimum requirements are protection and shelter from the elements. Shelter from wind is mandatory.
- Minimum pen/stall sizes are specified in the Animal Welfare Regulations, The Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, and The Guide for the Care and Use of Agricultural Animals in Agriculture Research and Teaching. Exceptions must be approved by the IACUC.
- Poorly ventilated stables predisposes horses to equine respiratory problems.
- Stall floors must drain well and be non-slippery.
- Rail or woven wire fences should be four and a half feet high to six feet high.
- Horses are non-ruminant grazing animals whose digestive system is adapted to frequent small feedings, preferably three times a day.
- Proper amount of food depends on the horse's size, age, exercise level, and laboratory use.
- Over feeding may result in founder or colic.
- Clean water should be available ad libitum. Do not water or feed an overheated animal.
- The adult horse drinks an average of 10-12 gallons per day.
- Trace mineral salt should be available free choice.
- Horses, like rats, have no gall bladder.
- They are usually handled from their left side, from a close but safe position (~45° off the shoulder).
- Physical contact should be maintained to help gain the horses' confidence.
- A lead and halter are often all that is needed to restrain a well trained horse.
- Tie rope no lower than the withers of the horse and twenty-four inches from post or ring using a quick-release knot.
- The handler should be on the same side of the horse as the person doing manipulation.
- For more specific species information, including physiologic data, husbandry and breeding requirements, and procedural information, please contact the Office of Laboratory Animal Care (865-974-5634).