

9 Blanket Rules

Blankets can be a source of warmth, soreness or death. Yes, horses have died from improper blanket management. So, read on to keep your horses comfy and safe.

1. The Bucking Strap

Broncos go wild because of a strap tight around the flank. When you undo the front buckle of a sheet or blanket, the horse has an involuntary reaction. The skin at the withers quivers, sliding the clothes back. At that point, surcingles that were fitted with plenty of slack, hit the big part of the barrel and become a bucking strap. There is NO WARNING. The horse goes blindly ballistic. I have known them to run through tied down tent flaps, through a wooden wall and even into a pool to drown. No kidding. This is very serious and it happens fast.

2. Determining Comfort

If a horse sweats in his clothes, he will likely colic. So, determining a horse's warmth is critical. All horses are different. Stallions tend to run hot, mares can be inconsistent. First, feel his ears. If they are cold, the horse is already really chilled. It is good if the chest and shoulder are toasty, but not clammy. Also check the kidneys, over the flank. Some horses run very different there. A warm back promotes soundness. That is why it is a good idea to feel the kidneys. Always throw a cooler over them when horses are standing or walking when it is chilly.



Fit surcingles with about four inches of slack.

Temperatures drop late at night and again around 4:00 a.m., so a night check is important.

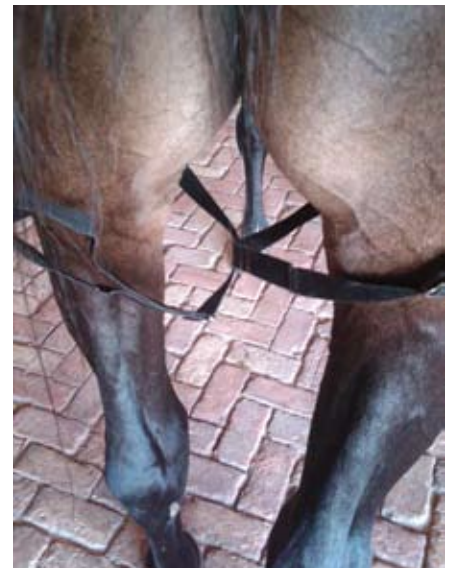
When in doubt, remember a horse can lie down to get warm but can get sick if too hot.

3. On

When putting on horses' clothes, always start from the front to back. Secure the chest before any surcingles, then leg straps.

4. Fitting

Clothes always slide back during the night. Plus, when horses lie down, their



Leg straps should hang between legs and above the hock. If the horse lies down and a strap catches a hock, he'll panic, scramble and hurt himself.

shoulders come up and forward. If their clothes are tight, this can inhibit circulation and make them sore. So, I always leave a good bit of slack in the chest to start. Turnout rugs are different. They need to be flush with the shoulders to keep dry.

Surcingles under the barrel should hang a good fist lower than the belly.



Lift blankets to move them so as not to push back hair and cause pain. Read: teach them to bite as defense.

However, for minis, that would be enough to get their foot through.

Leg straps can be dangerous if the horse lies down and a hock gets caught in them. So, adjust them to cross through each other and hang about six inches above the hock. Passing the straps through the loop of the other and fastening it to the same side allows them to hang between the legs instead of on them. This is safer and more comfortable.

5. Moving

Do you know a horse that tries to bite when you fuss with its clothing? That is because pushing hair back hurts. To move clothes, first fold them forward. Then, lift before moving them. Never just pull them over or up. Lift and move.

6. Off

Start from the back forward. That is, undo any leg straps, then belly surcingles before the chest. This will eliminate the chance for a bucking strap situation.

Likewise, if you are braiding and want to fold back the front for a couple braids, do not undo the chest without getting down to undo surcingles first. Trust me. The most seasoned braiders can tell horror stories about the time they were going to be quick and careful. If you want to undo the chest, undo surcingles first.

7. Rubs

I like bibs. To reduce rubbing at the chest, shoulders and withers, use an old bandage inner. Simply lay them over the



Recycle bandages to help reduce rubbing.

chest or through the withers. This is a great way to recycle them as well as keep horses warm and comfy.

Other ways to reduce rubbing are: keep horses clean, use a shampoo that does not strip oils, curry lots to bring out protective oils, and don't fasten the bottom chest buckle. However, for the latter, you need to be very careful. If the top buckle's stitching is compromised, don't risk it. It is not worth the front letting go.



A chest bib can take a bit of pressure off the shoulders and keep the chest toasty.

8. Washing

Try to use the same detergent. So, if there is a skin issue, you know it is not from the soap. Double rinsing things that go on horses' coats is always a good idea.

9. Consistency

Not all horses are blanketed. Whatever you do, be thoughtful. If you clip, you need to clothe. Adjust to each day's weather. If you do clothe your horses, make it a routine. Don't get lazy and leave your horse to suffer. Be mindful. Ask for help when you need it.

Keep these principles in mind and you'll enjoy more agreeable and sounder horses this winter. Enjoy!



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