



## Does My Horse Need A Blanket?

### Cold Weather and Your Horse's Comfort

One of the most frequently asked questions in the months leading into winter is whether or not your horse should be blanketed. Unfortunately, there is no simple answer. Instead, there are a number of factors to consider for each individual animal to determine their unique blanketing needs.

The first question to address is what is the body condition of the horse? Healthy weight and obese horses have a much greater ability to adapt to cold temperatures due to the insulating nature of fat than thin horses do. In order to properly determine your horse's body condition, here is an excellent reference from the University of Kentucky describing [how to body condition score horses](#). If your horse scores at a 6 or higher, chances are he will be able to acclimatize this winter without routine blanketing. If your horse is a body condition of 5 or less, please plan a minimum of lightweight blanketing during the chilly months. If you have any questions as to your horse's body condition scores, please feel free to contact us.

The second question is what type of shelter is provided for your horses? Adequate shelter can decrease or eliminate the need for blanketing in certain situations. A run-in shed is sufficient winter shelter for a young - to middle-aged animal in good body condition and good health. However, for a patient that is geriatric, has decreased mobility or poor body condition, a closed stall potentially with a blanket might be necessary to maintain the health of your horse.

Another question to consider is the type of winter hair coat your horse produces. Do you have a horse that develops a substantial winter coat? Or does your horse grow minimal winter cover? Those in the second category do require blanketing to survive the winter months.

Lastly, the weather must be taken into account. An unseasonable warm winter might make it possible to minimize blanketing. Horses are most comfortable at an ambient temperature of 45°F (this is referred to as their critical temperature). To put this in perspective, the critical temperature for humans is 72°F. Precipitation (rain, sleet or snow that moistens the hair coat) and wind chill raises the horse's critical temperature by at least 10°F. An extremely wet winter might require more extensive blanketing than otherwise required.

So please take all of these factors into careful consideration before determining whether or not to blanket your horse this winter. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact us for a more in-depth discussion.