

Preventative Health Care Series - Part Two

Protecting Your Investment: Vaccinations and Deworming

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A vital part of equine preventative health care is vaccinations and deworming. Vaccinations protect our horses from infectious diseases. Deworming is utilized to reduce the number of intestinal parasites or worms, which rob our horses of nutrients.

I started this series on the importance of establishing and maintaining a good working relationship with your veterinarian. And what a better time than spring to foster this relationship, with dialog pertaining to appropriate vaccinations and deworming for the year? Although most vaccines and dewormers are available without a veterinarian's assistance, selection of which products to use and appropriate administration timing can be confusing.

Vaccinations

Unfortunately, there is no one-size-fits-all vaccination protocol. Vaccination recommendations need to be tailored to the individual horse; based on age, sex, environment, geographic location, intended use, and exposure risk.

Only a few equine infectious diseases are fatal, namely tetanus, rabies, botulism, and the encephalities. But other infectious diseases can be just as costly, with veterinary treatment and down time from performance, training, or just plain enjoyment.

There are several vaccinations available against common infectious equine diseases, many manufactures and combinations. Your veterinarian, through the established relationship and previous visits, is your best resource in determining your horse's potential disease risk and can develop an appropriate vaccination schedule.

Deworming

The importance of deworming can easily be underestimated. It is easy for owners

to get a false sense of security, as they are deworming and the horse appears healthy with no worms in the manure. But even healthy-appearing horse can have parasites.

Intestinal parasite control can become ineffective from deworming by product brand name instead of by the active ingredient, under-dosing from inaccurate weight estimates or the horse spitting out dewormer, and parasite or worms becoming resistant to dewormers.

Your veterinarian can be useful in protecting your horse from the dangers of parasites, by performing fecal egg counts. This test will help you monitor and develop an effective deworming program. Your veterinarian can also advise you on management strategies to reduce the parasite burden.

Information

It is not uncommon for our clinic to receive a phone call requesting "spring vaccinations" or a "seven-way". As the conversation continues it becomes apparent that several of these horse owners are not familiar with what diseases they are vaccinating against or why. They are just aware that horses are supposed to get some vaccinations in the spring.

We encounter a similar problem when questioning owners on the last deworming product used or the current deworming program. Many owners are not mindful of the dewormer used. Products were most likely used or purchased based on cost or availability.

Informed disease prevention is key to maintaining a healthy horse. Horse owners should take an active role and obtain information to make educated decisions on their horse's health care. In today's information age there are several resources available. I recommend your veterinarian and approved websites, for example,



Christine Wilkin, DVM, with her Hanoverian mare, Caliente GH.

www.thehorse.com and www.americashealthyhorse.com

Conclusion

Vaccines and dewormers can be purchased from your veterinarian, catalogs, online, or from the farm or tack store. But it is my opinion that your veterinarian is an advocate for your horse and will provide you with the best health care plan. I do not begrudge an owner for purchasing products from a non-veterinary source, but be cautious of the advice given by non-veterinarians. Shipping costs, receiving warm or frozen products, expiration dates, and return policies can also be areas of concern.

Your veterinarian is responsible in assuring proper storage, handling, and administration of health care products, in addition to maintaining a medical record. Another benefit of veterinary involvement, is in the rare incident of an anaphylactic reaction, needing immediate veterinarian attention. But more commonly, with veterinarian administration, the risk of injection site soreness/abscesses, needle shyness, and vaccination of laminitic or sick horses, should be minimized.

To conclude, on a personal note our clinic has examined a fair number of horses with neck arthritis and are concerned that this may be associated with vaccine and/or antibiotic injections over the neck vertebra, instead of into the neck muscle. We have also seen an increase in preventable health diseases like diarrhea, parasitic colics, respiratory disease and even tetanus.

So, protect your investment: establish a trusting veterinary-client relationship and work together, to keep your horse healthy.



Small intestinal impaction/ obstruction with adult ascarids in a ~7 month-old filly.