

# IS YOUR HORSE READY FOR WINTER?

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As winter approaches, it is important to make sure that you and your horse are prepared to handle it. Your horse's general health should be assessed to make sure that he can handle the harsh weather of winter. It is also time to make sure that your horse is up to date on his preventative maintenance program, which includes vaccinations, deworming and dental care.

## Weight

One of the biggest concerns going into winter is whether or not your horse is at an adequate bodyweight to handle the upcoming inclement weather. If your horse is underweight, it may be necessary for your horse to be examined by your veterinarian to determine why. Dental abnormalities are one of the most common reasons for a horse to be underweight or to be a "hard keeper." Older horses may have a much harder time maintaining their body weight and may need to be fed higher calorie, more easily digestible feeds and/or supplements. Your veterinarian can provide you with specific recommendations for your horse. Internal parasites are another cause of weight loss in horses, and performing a fecal float can help determine if parasites are the culprit and if deworming is necessary. It may be necessary to run bloodwork to check the function of your horse's body systems for any possible disease processes that might be present.

## Vaccinations

Your horse should have received his spring vaccinations early in the year before the mosquito season started. It is now time to booster some of those vaccines to make sure that your horse is maximally protected this fall. Influenza and rhinopneumonitis vaccines should be given every 6 months, or as often as every 3 months if your horse

travels or shows frequently or if you are at a boarding stable where horses are continually coming and going. The West Nile Virus vaccine should also be boosted in the fall for the best protection against this mosquito-borne disease. Consult your veterinarian for other vaccines that may be needed depending on where you live or your show/travel plans.

## Deworming

The 'gold standard' for internal parasite control has changed in the last few years due to the development of parasite resistance to some of the commonly used dewormers, such as ivermectin. Ideally, a fecal sample should be submitted to your veterinary lab every 2-3 months to identify what parasite eggs are present. Dewormers are then administered to specifically treat the parasites found. If no or few parasite eggs are found, there is no need to deworm your horse. This also ensures that you pick the right dewormer to effectively treat all the parasites that are currently affecting your horse and don't miss treating something. Many of the large horse farms in Kentucky are now using this method of parasite management, as many parasites in this region have become resistant to certain dewormers. Fecal testing is relatively inexpensive and at most veterinary labs costs roughly what a tube of dewormer costs. Most people deworm their horses every 2-3 months, and, until recently, this was considered the most effective deworming schedule. If this method of deworming is used, deworming products should be alternated to prevent the parasites from building up resistance to one product.

It is important to deworm after we have had a good hard frost with a product that will target bots, such as ivermectin or moxidectin. First, remove any bot fly eggs on your horse's legs or body (the little yellow specks that don't come off with normal brushing). This can be done with a special bot knife or porous block (available in many farm stores or horse catalogs). After removing the bot eggs, administer the oral dewormer to kill any remaining adult bots in your horse's stomach so that they cannot hatch and lay more eggs. A product that combines ivermectin with another product, like praziquantel, makes a great choice as a fall dewormer, as it offers excellent coverage to eliminate nearly all parasites.

## Teeth

It is a good idea to have your horse's teeth examined every year to see if they need to be floated. If you have noticed that your horse is dropping feed or has developed a recent biting issue when riding, it is possible

that he may need his teeth floated. If your horse is underweight, is hard to keep weight on or has recently lost weight, it is possible that he has a problem with his teeth that is making it uncomfortable for him to eat or difficult for him to adequately chew his food. With winter fast approaching it is important to ensure that your horse's teeth are in the best shape possible so your horse can maximize the nutrients from his feed.

Unlike in people, a horse's teeth grow continually throughout his/her lifetime. Because of this, and the way that horses chew their food in a somewhat circular pattern, they can develop sharp points on their teeth as some areas of the teeth are worn down more than others. These sharp points can cause cuts and ulcers on the cheeks and tongue. Your veterinarian can examine your horse's teeth for sharp points and can file them down so that your horse can more comfortably eat.

If your horse has lost any of his adult teeth, he will need to have his teeth floated every 6-12 months. Since adult horse teeth continually grow, once a tooth is missing, there is nothing for the opposing tooth to grind on and it does not get worn down appropriately. This tooth slowly becomes taller and taller than the other teeth around it and can make it difficult for the horse to chew his food. To prevent this, it is necessary for your veterinarian to grind down the taller tooth to the same level as the surrounding teeth.

While a younger horse may be able to go several years between floats, once a horse reaches the age of 20, I recommend having his teeth floated every year. Older horses have much less tooth left to grow out and it can be much harder to correct dental abnormalities once they are present. Because of the shorter tooth roots in older horses, they are also much more likely to have loose or broken teeth that need to be removed and/or an uneven grinding surface that needs to be leveled. Older horses will have a harder time maintaining a good body weight, and making sure that their teeth are in the best shape possible will help them get the most nutrients out of their feed this winter.

If you are unsure if your horse is ready for winter, your veterinarian is only a phone call away. It is much easier and cheaper to prevent a problem before it arises than to treat it later. Your veterinarian can perform a physical exam on your horse to help you determine his individual needs.