



IT'S SPRING – LET'S TALK VACCINATIONS.....

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With spring right around the corner, this is the time to be thinking about getting your horse's spring vaccinations done. With so many different diseases to vaccinate against, not to mention all the brands of vaccines, it's a challenge to decide how to proceed.

The American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) has published some general guidelines that may help to simplify things. Currently, they recommend that each horse receive a core set of vaccinations each spring that includes:

- Eastern and Western Encephalitis
- Tetanus
- Rabies
- West Nile Virus.

The rationale? From the AAEP website, the AVMA defines core vaccinations as those “that protect from diseases that are endemic to a region, those with potential public health significance, required by law, virulent/highly infectious, and/or those posing a risk of severe disease. Core vaccines have clearly demonstrated efficacy and safety, and thus exhibit a high enough level of patient benefit and low enough level

of risk to justify their use in the majority of patients.” The vaccinations listed above meet these criteria.

Risk-based vaccinations are the other category of vaccinations that should be considered. From the AAEP website, “these are vaccinations included in a vaccination program after the performance of a risk-benefit analysis. The use of risk-based vaccinations may vary regionally, from population to population within an area, or between individual horses within a given population. Disease risk may not be readily identified by laypersons; it is important to consult a veterinarian when developing a vaccination program.” This list includes the following:

- Anthrax
- Botulism
- Equine Herpes virus (Rhinopneumonitis)
- Equine Viral Arteritis
- Equine Influenza
- Potomac Horse Fever
- Rotaviral Diarrhea
- Strangles



Which vaccinations from this list you choose may be dependent on where you live, what you do with your horse and what you and your veterinarian determine is necessary to keep your horse healthy. For more information on each of the diseases listed above, go to the aaep.org.

I guess another question that veterinarians are often faced with is why vaccinate at all, especially if “my horses don't go anywhere and I don't have any new horses coming onto my property”? Many of the diseases covered by the core vaccinations carry a high mortality rate (fatal to horses), for example tetanus is reported to be fatal greater than 80 % of the time. Recent outbreaks

of eastern encephalitis in the US this year, which is fatal in 75-100% of the cases and transmitted by insects, has only pointed out the importance of vaccinating for this disease. West Nile is infective to horses through the bites of infected mosquitoes, a factor in this disease that is extremely difficult to control. A rabid animal that bites your horses means your horse not only faces almost certain death, but rabies carries a significant health risk to any human involved in caring for the horse. Any way you look at it, these diseases are difficult to control and, with significant risk to your horse and potentially to you, makes vaccinations seem like “cheap insurance” to keep your horse healthy. If you have questions about vaccination protocols, I would again direct you to the aaep.org website. Once on their home page, click on “vaccination guidelines”, look to the right of the text and click on “vaccination charts” to find the information you are looking for.

AND WHILE YOUR VETERINARIAN IS THERE.....

This is the perfect time to have a wellness examination done. Most of us put ourselves through a yearly physical exam, with our physician, to make sure that we are healthy and to detect any early signs of disease. Many of us, as horse owners, have not yet taken the opportunity to do the same for our horse. A yearly physical examination by your veterinarian, complete with some routine blood work if needed, can reassure you that your horse is in good health. If the examination and blood work are all normal, then you have a baseline to compare to if something were to surface at a later date. If anything abnormal is discovered, then immediate action can be taken to determine the problem and formulate a treatment plan. The earlier a condition is detected, the more likely it will be for a good outcome. Your horse may look good on the outside – take a few minutes once a year to make sure that all is well on the inside.

Parasite control is something that we should all be concerned about. It may not be as simple as just giving a “tube of dewormer now and again”. Putting together a parasite control program tailored specifically for your horse and the environment in which he lives can be confusing at best. Your veterinarian can walk you through a plan to keep your horse healthy and as free as possible from damaging internal parasites.

A Coggins test can also be done at this spring visit. This test is required for horses to travel interstate, to attend horse shows and events, and even to move from one barn to another (if your board your horse). This is a blood test that is done by your veterinarian for which you will receive a copy of the test result for your records.



Take a moment with your veterinarian to discuss any questions/ concerns you have about your horse. Your veterinarian can also update you on any new developments or ideas that he or she may feel is important to you and your horse. Advances are being made at such a rapid pace in the world of horse health; it's hard for all of us to keep up. This spring visit can be a time in which you can learn something new that will greatly benefit you and your horse.

Good luck on all your horse endeavors in this upcoming year!!

