Preventative Health Measures for Horses

PREVENTATIVE MEDICINE

Spring is almost here, and horse owners everywhere are preparing for another busy year of riding and showing. After a winter of inactivity (at least for most of us in snowy Michigan and the Midwest!) horses are suddenly worked harder and are exposed to stresses such as the new insect and parasite population, as well as other horses and their diseases. Because of this, it is the time when it is most important to consider a preventative maintenance program that will help ensure your horse's health throughout the summer. Info obtained from the internet on this URL: http://www.horsenetwork.com/vet/askthevettopicsright.html

Vaccinations

EFT ("4-WAY"): This vaccine contains protection against several different diseases:	
Encephalitis ("Sleeping Sickness")	This is a viral disease that attacks the nervous system of mammals (including humans), and is almost always fatal. It is spread via mosquitoes, and should be given annually in the spring, although if your horse moves to a part of the country with year-round mosquitoes, bi-annual vaccination is recommended. There are three different varieties of encephalitis: Eastern, Western, and Venezuelan. If your horse resides in the Midwest, it is unnecessary to vaccinate for Venezuelan encephalitis unless he is traveling to Southwestern states such as New Mexico or Texas.
Influenza ("Flu")	This is a viral disease, and is spread by contact with an infected horse. Affected horses will have various signs, including fever, cough, and muscle soreness. Vaccination should be performed at least annually, and horses which are exposed to many other horses, such as during shows should be vaccinated at least twice a year.
Tetanus ("Lockjaw")	Horses are extremely sensitive to the tetanus toxin, which is produced by a bacterium which will grow in wounds, especially deep puncture wounds.
Tetanus (cont)	Tetanus toxin will cause horses to have generalized extreme muscle contractions as well as paralysis of the diaphragm muscles which will render the horse unable to breathe. Tetanus in horses is usually fatal once signs appear, and treatment is generally unsuccessful. Tetanus vaccination should be repeated annually.

RHINOPNEUMONITIS ("Rhino")
This is also a viral disease, spread by contact with infected horses. Signs include fever, coughing, and nasal discharge. There are several Rhino vaccinations available, some of which prevent the cough and others which prevent abortion caused by a different variety of the virus. It is important that your horse be vaccinated with the correct type of vaccine for the situation. Horses should be vaccinated every three months while exposed to other horses, such as during the show season.

POTOMAC HORSE FEVER
This is caused by a microorganism, and causes diarrhea, fever, colic, and founder. It may be fatal in some cases even with supportive medical care. Although the exact mechanism by which the disease is spread is unknown, it is believed to be spread by ticks or other blood sucking insects. Diarrhea from infected horses is not infective. Vaccination for this disease should be performed annually.

RABIES
Although the risk of your horse contracting rabies in many areas is still small, the fatal nature of the disease and danger to humans has led many more horse owners to vaccinate for rabies than in the past. New strains of the disease, as well as increasing populations of raccoons and skunks in some areas are also factors in the number of vaccinated horses. In horses, rabies vaccination should be performed annually.

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OTHER SPRING HEALTH CARE

Preventative spring care should also include a thorough exam. Teeth may need to be floated, your horse may have sand in his intestine which may cause colic or cause your horse to lose weight, or have other health needs. Other beneficial care may include a blood selenium test to ensure that your horse does not have a deficiency of this important mineral. A low selenium level may seriously affect your horse's ability to perform as the year progresses and he begins to be worked harder, and may also decrease his resistance to infection. Spring care should also include a fecal exam to determine the effectiveness of your worming program.

Spring is also a good time to have your gelding's sheath cleaned if he has not had it done for some time. Although some horses are willing to let an owner clean a sheath without sedation, frequently the only way that a sheath can be thoroughly cleaned is if a horse is tranquilized.

WORMING

There is much debate over the most successful way to keep horses free of intestinal parasites. One thing that is agreed upon is that no matter what kind of wormer you use, rotating your wormer is essential to a good program. The following recommendations are based on recent research into the resistance patterns of parasites which are emerging, and how best to counteract these newly resistant worms.

There are five different classes of wormer:

- Ivermectin (Zimectrin, Equvalan)
- Pyrantel (Strongid)
- Oxbendazole (Anthelcide)
- Benzimidazoles (Active ingredient ends in -zole)

Please note that Quest is not mentioned because the present claims of the manufacturer are not reasonable given what we know about the life cycle of the parasites, and until more is known about the actual effectiveness of this wormer, I am not adding it to this worming program. I do believe here that you could reasonably assume that anyway you use Ivermectin, you could use Quest.

For areas in which the winter temperature drops below freezing, I do not believe that it is necessary to worm during the winter. In other areas, worming should be performed year-round. I believe that Ivermectin should be used twice a year every year, and other wormers should be used monthly, with a change to a different monthly wormer being made annually.

Recommend a double dose of Strongid given at least once a year to treat horses of tapeworm, a parasite which seems to be increasing in prevalence. I would recommend this if your horse is pastured with many other horses, if fecal exams show that your horse has tapeworm (although many infected horses will test negative on a fecal exam), if your horse is a "poor doer", or if he is prone to frequent bouts of colic.

Ivermectin is given spring and fall to treat for bots, since this is the only wormer other than Quest that kills bot larvae in the stomach.

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