

Ask A Vet: Time for Spring Vaccines and Yearly Checkup

Sunday, April 13, 2014

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

It is spring time, finally, and some of our neighbors have mentioned that they are getting the spring shots and check up for their horses. What does that involve and do we need to do that for our horses?

-Curious Horse Owner

Dear Curious,

There are many options for horse owners for disease monitoring, disease prevention, and overall health check-ups. Before deciding on a full course of action, I recommend that you contact your equine veterinarian and discuss what health plan is good for you and your horse.

First, it is recommended that your horse be examined on an annual basis to check for any potential rising health problems. Depending on the physical exam findings, age of the horse, etc., your doctor may recommend checking blood work. This can help to monitor your horse's metabolism and general organ function. A very important part of the physical exam is checking your horse's teeth. Horse teeth grow continually throughout the year. Depending on how your horse chews his/her food, they can form sharp points on the inner or outer surface of the teeth. These points can cause ulcers on the tongue or cheek and can impact your overall horse's health. Additionally, it is important to check for cavities or broken teeth. Second, when it comes to vaccines, there are many different options and varying protocols. First, it is important to discuss risks with your veterinarian. At minimum, horses should be vaccinated with a tetanus toxoid. Tetanus is a completely preventable disease and a simple wound can develop a tetanus infection which can be lethal to your horse. Usually tetanus comes in combination with other vaccines such as West Nile (prevalent in this area), Eastern Equine Encephalitis, Western Equine Encephalitis, Influenza, Rhinopneumonitis, and/or Encephalomyelitis. Other common vaccines are for prevention of Rabies, Potomac Horse Fever, and Strangles (*Streptococcus equi* spp. *equi*). Depending on your barn or showing/competition situation, your veterinarian may recommend a particular vaccination protocol. Finally, a deworming plan should be set up at your farm/barn. Most horse owners deworm 2-3 times per year on their own. It is recommended that once per year, a fecal sample is submitted to determine if your horse is carrying a heavy load of worms. Depending on the worm burden on your pasture, and if the horse is a high vs. medium vs. low egg shedder, your veterinarian may increase or decrease your deworming protocol, or offer suggestions as to what product to use.

These suggestions are a basic coverage of the three main aspects of equine preventative care. For more information and to develop a proper plan for you and your horse's needs, contact your veterinarian.

-Dr. Jason Heitzman