

Protect Your Horse Against Infectious Diseases Through Immunization

Few things will protect your horse from the ravages of disease as easily and effectively as immunizations. The vaccinations administered by your veterinarian to your horse place a protective barrier between the animal and a whole list of problems, including tetanus, encephalomyelitis (sleeping sickness), influenza, rhinopneumonitis, rabies, strangles, West Nile virus and Potomac Horse Fever, to name the most common.

A good immunization program is essential to responsible horse ownership, but just as in humans, vaccination does not guarantee 100 percent protection. In some situations, immunization may decrease the severity of disease but not prevent it completely. This is due to many complicated scientific reasons, such as differences in the virulence or severity of some diseases (such as influenza).

Vaccination involves the injection of bacteria or viruses that are inactivated or modified to avoid causing actual disease in the horse. Recently intranasal vaccinations have been developed for immunization against influenza and strangles. Two or more doses are usually needed to initiate an adequate immune response.

Once the immunization procedure is completed, the protective antibodies in the blood stand guard against the invasion of specific diseases. Over time, however, these antibodies gradually decline. Therefore, a second vaccination is required to boost immunity to acceptable levels. Protection against some diseases such as tetanus and rabies can be accomplished by boosting once a year. Others require more frequent intervals to provide adequate protection.

The specific immunizations needed by a particular horse or horses depend upon several factors, including environment, age, use, exposure risk, value, geographic location and general management. Your local equine veterinarian can help you determine the vaccination program best suited to your horse's individual needs.

Vaccinations are a vital part of proper equine management. If incorporated into a program that includes regular deworming, an ample supply of clean water, a good nutrition program and a safe environment, you and your horse will be all set to enjoy many happy, healthy, productive years together.

For more information about immunizations or about appropriate vaccination schedules, ask your equine veterinarian for the "Immunizations: Protect Your Horse From Infectious Diseases" brochure, provided by the AAEP in partnership with Educational Partner Bayer HealthCare Animal Health. Or visit www.aaep.org/vaccination_guidelines.htm, for the complete AAEP Vaccination Guidelines

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