

***Congratulations on owning your horse! Horses are our companions and among other things, give us confidence, exercise, growth, and peace. In return, we are responsible for maintaining their physical and social health. Physical health means preventing disease, providing good nutrition, regular dental care, and musculoskeletal/hoof soundness.***

## IMMUNIZATIONS

Horses can contract viral and bacterial diseases. Some of these can be prevented or their seriousness decreased through vaccinations.

### **Tetanus**

This disease is caused by a bacteria, *Clostridium tetani*. The bacteria lives in the soil and can enter the horse through an opening in the skin, such as a cut. Horses are ten times more susceptible to tetanus than people. The disease causes a constant contraction of the muscles, prevents chewing and is almost always fatal. Prevention of this disease is excellent with vaccination.

### **Encephalitis**

Commonly called sleeping sickness, both the Eastern and Western varieties are found in Colorado. The Venezuelan form is occasionally present in the southern parts of the United States. This disease enters the horse through the bite of the mosquito. Clinical signs are of brain disease which causes severe depression, staggering, and paralysis. The death rate can be 50% up to 90% for horses which are infected. Prevention is successful with an annual vaccination.

### **Influenza**

This is a viral disease, very similar to the flu virus in humans. The disease causes a high fever, depression, loss of appetite, and abundant, white nasal discharge. This disease is very contagious and is transmitted between horses by coughing or snorting over distances as far as 30 yards. There are few deaths with this disease but considerable loss of use when horses are sick. The vaccination for this disease has good, not great effectiveness which lasts for 3-6 months.

### **Rhinopneumonitis**

Also a viral disease, rhinopneumonitis causes respiratory disease, abortion, and/or neurologic signs. This virus is passed from horse to horse by coughing. The respiratory form is usually mild, a cough and runny nose lasting for days to a few weeks, the abortion form kills the fetus, the neurologic form can cause temporary paralysis of the bladder and muscles, or can be fatal. Vaccination for this disease is done to broodmares at 5, 7, 9 months gestation, to horses for the respiratory and neurologic form every 3-6 months.

### **Strangles**

A bacterial disease caused by the bacteria, *Streptococcus equi*, strangles causes a greenish runny nose, enlarged glands under the jaw, and high fever. During an outbreak, 40-90% of the horses will catch this disease, 10% will die. There is a vaccine for protection from this disease but because the vaccine is not very effective and has adverse sequelae, its use is limited.



## PARASITES

Almost all horses have parasites. Parasites which live inside the horse are treated depending upon the life cycle of the parasite.

***Strongylus vulgaris***, commonly called the bloodworm, is 1-2 inches long, and thin as a thread. These worms are eaten as larva in the manure or grass and are excreted in the feces. These worms cause colic, anemia, poor hair coat, unthriftiness. Prevention is through good manure control and administration of deworming agents, either every 2 months, or once a day.

***Ascarids***, the round worm, are most common in horses under 2 years of age but can be present in all horses. They live in the lungs and intestines causing pneumonia, colic, unthriftiness. Prevention is again manure control, and deworming at least twice a year.

***Flies*** can lay their eggs on the horses skin, the horses lick off these eggs and the eggs mature in the horses stomachs into bots. Numerous bots can cause colic, ruptured stomach, and poor thriftiness. Deworming once a year, after the flies have died from cold weather controls this parasite.

Deworming can be done two ways. Purge deworming is administering a chemical which will kill the worms in the horse and is done every two months. Continuous deworming is administering a small amount of chemical in the feed every day which will kill the larval worms. The continuous method is preferred as this prevents the larva from migrating through the horse during its life cycle, destroying the tissues and causing inflammation and damage to the horses body. Purge deworming kills parasites after damage has been done to the horse's body.

## DENTAL CARE

Horses teeth are different than humans in that they have no nerves and continue to "grow" throughout the horses life. Because teeth are worn down as the horse chews, uneven wear, sharp points and thus loss of function of the teeth is very common. This is a common cause for weight loss, head tossing and early death. Yearly examination of the teeth, their function, and excoriations in the horses mouth will tell your veterinarian if dental treatment is needed. If so, the sharp edges, and unevenness of the teeth are filed down in a process called floating.

## GENERAL HEALTH

The brightness of the horses eye, the body posture of a horse, his appreciation of the activities around him are all signs of a healthy body. These signs are noticed by your veterinarian if the horse is observed at least yearly. A general physical exam will give veterinarians an appreciation of the overall health and happiness of your horse.

## SOUNDNESS EVALUATION

The number one reason people call their veterinarian is because of lameness in their horse. Usually lamenesses are conditions which worsen slowly in a horses life until a limp is noticed. Often a lameness will be in two legs at the same time so there will not be a limp, but there will be a shortness of gait, or a tripping when ridden. Lameness is the number one reason people retire horses or get new ones. Evaluation of the horses gait, testing of the hoof, and flexion of various joints will inform veterinarians if a lameness is approaching. If so, prevention at this time will significantly decrease pathology, thus the longevity of the horse will increase and the cost to treat a condition will decrease.

## YEARLY SCHEDULE FOR HEALTH CARE

### March, April, May, or June

- ✓ Vaccinations
  - *Sleeping sickness*
  - *Tetanus*
  - *Influenza*
  - *Rhinopneumonitis*
  - *West Nile*
- ✓ Deworming
  - *Ivermectin*
- ✓ General health/nutrition discussion
- ✓ Soundness evaluation

### September, October, November

- ✓ Vaccinations
  - *Influenza*
  - *Rhinopneumonitis*
- ✓ Deworming
  - *Ivermectin*
- ✓ Dental exam/Floating
- ✓ Soundness evaluation

Deworming:

- 1) purge deworming, pasting every 2 months, or
- 2) continuous deworming, daily dosing of deworming agent.

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## SUMMARY

Horses are all individuals just like their owners. The above program may be right for some, but others may have different needs. Please discuss with us your goals and requirements for your horse and yourself. We will help you design a program which will best serve all your needs.